

# Minors' advertising literacy in relation to new advertising formats

Risk analysis overview and policy recommendations



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The advertising landscape has altered dramatically in the last decade. Advertising is omnipresent and is reaching us into nearly all areas of our lives. More importantly, minors (children and teenagers) are targeted by advertising professionals more often and new tactics are being used for persuasion. The lines between the commercial message and media content have blurred. Many advertising formats are no longer static, but encourage people to actively engage with the commercial content. With the emergence of web 2.0, much personal information and user generated content is now used to tailor and personalize advertisements. Finally, advertising has become highly entertaining and capitalizes on the emotions of consumers. These new tactics of integration, interaction, personalization and high entertainment challenge children's advertising literacy that helps them to understand and cope with advertising.

## Aim

This document summarizes the risk analysis that has been written within the context of the AdLit project. The overall aim of the risk analysis was to identify and assess the risks connected to advertising formats in a new media environment targeting minors aged 7 to 18. Therefore, we need an overview of the advertising formats minors are exposed to and their level of advertising literacy towards each of these formats. After all, the combination of high exposure rate to an advertising format with a low level of advertising literacy, entails a high risk. In this report, we established that children (<12 years old) and teenagers (>12 years old) are not always targeted via the same advertising formats.

In addition, we need to know how their immediate (parents and teachers) and non-immediate surrounding (advertising professionals and policy) offers empowerment and protection to cope with these new advertising formats. When children have a low level of advertising literacy towards a certain advertising format without any provided protection or encouraged empowerment, an even higher risk can be expected.

To take into account the capabilities and skills of minors as well as their surroundings, the following key questions were put forward in the risk analysis: 1) Which new advertising formats are minors the most exposed to?; 2) What is the current level of advertising literacy of minors for new advertising formats?; 3) How do parents and advertising professionals perceive new advertising formats?; 4) How do schools help children and teenagers to cope with new advertising formats?; 5) How are these advertising formats (self-)regulated?

In this final section, we will summarize and discuss the main findings of the research report addressing the abovementioned groups (minors, parents, advertising professionals, schools and regulation) and formulate policy recommendations.



by S. De Jans, P. De Pauw, I. Vanwesenbeeck, V. Cauberghe, & L. Hudders

A thorough analysis of children's media usage and the advertising formats used to target children enabled us to identify five advertising formats that children are exposed to most often: television commercials, advergames, brand integration, online banners and video advertising. Next to an extensive literature review, six empirical studies conducted within the AdLit project provide new insights on children's current level of advertising literacy towards these formats. A total of 1.343 Flemish children between 7 and 12 years participated in our research studies. One qualitative and five experimental studies were conducted to compare children's advertising literacy for the traditional TV commercial versus embedded and hybrid advertising.

### ADVERGAMES ARE PUZZLING YOUNG CHILDREN

Results of various experiments suggest that young children had most difficulties to recognize advergames as commercial content and to understand their persuasive intent, which is in line with previous studies. At the same time, children report a more positive brand attitude when they played an advergame, compared to when they watched a TV spot. The positive effect on children's brand attitude can be attributed to the positive feelings that are induced by the game. In other words, the positive attitude towards the game is transferred over to the brand. Because advergames are fun, children are not motivated to think critically about the commercial content embedded in the game. In addition, when children do recognize the advergame's commercial intentions, this does not impact children's brand attitude. This indicates that they do not activate their advertising literacy when playing an advergame due to its fun and immersive nature.

### BANNER BLINDNESS, ALSO FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Our research reveals that children are able to recognize banners better as commercial content and understand its persuasive intent compared to advergames, but slightly worse compared to the television commercial. When looking at the advertising effects, results of an experimental study reveal that only 17% of the young children remembered the brand that was depicted in the online banner, which was the lowest of the ad formats investigated. This indicates that banner blindness also occurs at this very young age. The brand shown in the TV commercial scored highest on brand recall: 47% of the children correctly recalled the brand. Both advergames and sponsored content induced a correct brand recall of about 40%, which is significantly higher compared to the online banner. The results show that correct brand recall is higher when children have a good advertising recognition and a higher understanding of advertising. These

results imply that a high cognitive advertising literacy may result in more positive (cognitive) brand effects. To conclude and whereas results show a low effectiveness of online banners in terms of cognitive ad effects, the affective and behavioral effects appear to be higher. An online banner leads to slightly higher pester power compared to TV commercials and sponsored content (this latter is the least effective in terms of pestering parents to buy the product).

## PRODUCT PLACEMENT, A PROBLEMATIC FORMAT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

A literature review and experimental research found that young children have a lot of difficulties with recognizing product placement as advertising. In one experiment, results indicated that only 11% of the children recognized the brand placed in the program, though children between 10 and 11 years old did score significantly higher than the younger children (7-8 years). In another study, it was demonstrated that (8- to 10-year-old) children's cognitive advertising literacy for brand placement can be triggered, namely through disclosures, and most effectively through visual forewarning cues (using a disclosure before the movies or program starts). However, it was also found that the advertising literacy (as activated by these cues) did not mitigate children's attitude toward the placed brand. While this cue-activated advertising literacy had no effect on brand attitude among the most skeptical children, it even resulted in more positive brand attitudes among the least skeptical children. This may indicate that children's knowledge about the use of covert marketing tactics is incomplete (and even more so among the less skeptical children), which prevents them from forming well-substantiated (moral) evaluations about formats such as brand placement.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MORAL ADVERTISING LITERACY

Almost all experiments indicate that children's moral (judgments of the advertising fairness) and affective advertising literacy (affective evaluation of the advertising format) is low for the embedded and hybrid advertising formats. Although this may indicate that children are not critical towards the different strategies and do not question their use, these facets appear to be important moderators in altering advertising effects (see also previous section). Accordingly, our experimental research on advergames and product placements show that cognitive advertising literacy (ad recognition and understanding of the persuasive intent) has a positive effect on brand attitudes, but only for children who are less critical towards advertising. For children who are more critical towards advertising, cognitive advertising literacy can lower their attitude towards the brand placed in the game. In the case of product placement, the positive effects of cognitive advertising literacy on brand attitudes just disappeared among children that are more skeptical toward the format.

## IF YOU DIDN'T NOTICE, YOU'RE NOT PERSUADED?

Furthermore, a qualitative study showed that young children are under the impression that advertising does not affect them when they do not consciously notice the brand. This may explain why their judgements of fairness of the embedded and hybrid ad formats are quite positive, as they evaluate these formats primarily on the fact that such formats do not interrupt the media content and therefore do not cause irritation. Of course, the empirical studies show persuasion does occur among these children, but implicitly through affect transfer from context to brand, without their conscious awareness. Making them aware of such processes, however, children showed the ability (to use their moral advertising literacy) to judge ad formats using covert tactics as unfair or manipulative.



by B. Zarouali, M. Walrave, K. Poels, & K. Ponnet

For various advertising formats, such as television commercials, advergames and brand integration, the literature indicates that one's advertising literacy increases with age. Therefore, teenagers (12-18 year) have received less scholarly attention because they are considered less vulnerable to advertising effects, and thus no priority group for academic exploration. However, this line of reasoning does not apply to all new (online) advertising practices.

Already in the mid-nineties, studies demonstrated that even teenagers may have difficulties with understanding traditional advertising. Nowadays, with regards to embedded and hybrid advertising formats (e.g. advergames, product placement, etc.), adolescents have poor knowledge about these persuasive techniques due to inexperience and unfamiliarity. Therefore, it is imperative that teenagers are not to be left aside in contemporary marketing research, and more so, be considered a priority group. A very interesting research venue to investigate among teenagers is advertising on social networking sites (SNSs). SNSs have witnessed an enormous increase in popularity over the past few years, with teenagers being the most active users of these social platforms. On SNSs, teenagers are regularly exposed to a particular kind of commercial content that is omnipresent, namely targeted advertising. Unfortunately, little empirical efforts have been undertaken so far to investigate this topic, making it a underdeveloped research area. Therefore, it is important to gain a thorough understanding of how teens cope with these targeted persuasion strategies on SNSs.

First, a large scale survey study showed that teenagers claim to have a moderate recognition and understanding of advertising. In addition, teenagers have a rather negative stance towards advertising, perceive it as an unfair practice and claim to strongly resist advertising in the current commercial media environment. Further, the study revealed that approximately 26.9% of the teenagers sometimes use ad blockers. However, more than half of the teenagers 56.3% had no idea what ad blockers are.

Next, an experimental study showed how targeted advertising leads to a higher ad skepticism than non-targeted advertising. In turn, this negatively influences the purchase intention of a product. Moreover, teenagers who are more concerned about their privacy are also more skeptical towards retargeting. Therefore, it could be advisable to teach adolescents about online privacy risks in order to protect their personal information and react more critically to online marketing strategies that use their personal information, as does retargeting. Furthermore, results showed that when adolescents were helped by a cue that informs them about the persuasion tactic (debriefing text), they reacted more skeptically toward retargeting. This could imply that that adolescents are not always consciously aware of retargeted advertising. Based on the latter, it could be interesting to implement an advertising cue to notify adolescents that advertising is being shown, which should then activate their critical and skeptical advertising coping strategies.

In a second experimental study, it was investigated how peer communication influences both cognitive advertising literacy and attitudes toward social advertising. Specifically, the authors showed that when teenagers are chatting on SNS, they generate more positive attitudes towards social advertising, and at the same time, they activate less persuasion knowledge. Moreover, a difference was found between chatting with a weak or strong connection: chatting on SNS with a strong tie leads to an even lower persuasion knowledge for social ads. In short, this shows that peer influence plays an important explanatory role in adolescents' advertising literacy and attitudes. These findings reveal some important conclusions regarding the social influence dynamics on SNS that affects adolescents advertising literacy. More specifically, adolescents are not always aware of the commercial intent of social advertising on SNSs (i.e. lower advertising literacy) when they engage in online peer communication, and certainly when they chat with a strong tie.



## 4. VULNERABLE AUDIENCES AND ADVERTISING LITERACY



by S. Lissens & J. Bauwens

In the risk analysis we have argued that little research has been devoted to socio-economic status (SES) when investigating advertising literacy of minors and virtually no studies have focused on vulnerable children and young people. However, it is not unconceivable that household income, parents' education and occupation, hence consumption opportunities and behaviors in general affect minors' advertising literacy. Indeed, in the larger field of media literacy SES is identified as a major factor influencing the possession and access to media technologies and the development of digital skills and literacies. The literature review further revealed that when SES-related data is considered, it is most often from an instrumental point of view (e.g., in terms of describing the sample). To meet these shortcomings an exploratory qualitative study was set up with 59 respondents (pre-adolescents, aged 11-13) from schools with a disadvantaged profile, identified by means of aggregate and anonymized SES-characteristics of the school population. Specifically, the study focused on the preadolescents' advertising opinions, experiences and perceptions in order to expose issues potentially affecting disadvantaged minors' advertising literacy.

Overall, the pre-adolescents mainly mentioned clearly delineated and overt advertising formats (i.e. advertising in folders, on busses, in shops and on TV). This finding reinforces AdLit's overall plea to put greater efforts in research and education on more covert advertising strategies that young people are dealing with on a daily basis. However, the pre-adolescents also showed elaborate reasoning and reflection skills when less noticeable and more immersive advertising strategies and formats were brought up by the researcher, such as: premiums, celebrity branding, product placement, advergames, in-game advertising and personalized advertising on social networks. The elaborate, savvy and vivid discussions provided a clear illustration of the embeddedness of advertising in these young people's everyday lives. They also exemplified how advertising can be a tool for empowerment and emancipation, not only in the way they are processing and interpreting advertising, but also in the way they make use of advertising in terms of educational performances. Talking about advertising; reciting advertising texts; reasoning what certain advertising strategies aim to do: the pre-adolescents felt particularly confident and knowledgeable in a formal school context, which is not self-evident for young people with a disadvantaged background.

Further, the respondents also ascribed a strong informational function to advertising. Although this is generally interpreted as indicating lower levels of advertising literacy, we learned that advertising plays a key role in their everyday consumer opportunities and experiences in terms of spending and saving money, with concrete financial implications and outcomes for themselves, their parents and their families. Hence, looking out for deals and offers through advertising is



closely related to the experienced cost of living. Finally, the majority of the pre-adolescents had a migration background, resulting in the consumption of international media, TV channels first and foremost, which obviously affects the nature and amount of advertising they are exposed to. For example, they mentioned comparative advertising and they had the impression that the TV channels stemming from the country of their (parents') origins broadcast a lot more advertising.

Based on the results, we argue that the following issues might affect disadvantaged minors' advertising literacy. First, the disadvantaged pre-adolescents were elaborate on advertising presented in the public environment and on traditional advertising formats, but rarely referred to new media and new advertising formats when not prompted to it. This might imply that these preadolescents have a high advertising literacy for traditional advertising, but are less knowledgeable about new advertising formats typically consumed in the home environment. Second, because popular television shows are also consumed via foreign channels they might be exposed to other and/or more types of advertising – which might also not be included in Flemish regulation or education.

To further understand how (much) SES affects advertising literacy and how advertising literacy is developed among vulnerable audiences, more systematic research is required to surpass the explorative nature of the current study. When doing so, the complex and diversified conceptualization and operationalization of SES should be taken into account. This includes the following: the study of parental educational level, parental professional level and household income; indirect questioning by means of job description, number of books the family possesses, social geographic information, school indicators, etc.; qualitative and quantitative variation in response categories; the challenge of non-stigmatizing phrasing and verbalization in both the communication with the respondents and the reporting on data.

## 5. PARENT'S VIEWS ON ADVERTISING TOWARDS CHILDREN



by K. Daems, P. De Pelsmacker, I. Moons, P. De Pauw, L. Hudders, V. Cauberghe, & I. Vanwesenbeeck

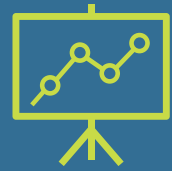
Parents play an important role in minor's consumer socialization. They assist children and young-adolescents gaining consumers skills, of which an important part are the advertising literacy skills. Two studies within the AdLit project have paid attention to parental views on advertising towards children: one study focusing on parental advertising literacy and mediation towards contemporary advertising formats, the other study focusing on parental perception towards advertising.

In the first study, 300 parents from children between 7 and 12 years old participated in a study on parental advertising literacy and advertising mediation styles in the context of five advertising formats: TV commercials, product placement, online banners, retargeted pre-roll video ads and advergames. This study established that parents are quite aware of the studied advertising formats. Advergames are an exception: parents' ability to recognize this format is lower. Further, parents adopt a critical attitude towards advertising in general. However, most parents prefer to avoid advertising completely. While communicating with their children about advertising, parents are rather neutral: they are more likely to talk about the selling intent of advertising, rather than telling their children that advertising can be 'bad'. Analyzing parental advertising literacy and mediation, it can be considered a good thing that parents indicate to be knowledgeable about most new advertising formats (except advergames). However, they rarely discuss the existence or presence of these advertising formats with their children.

The second study, which included 436 parents, used a survey to map parental opinions on the usage of new advertising formats targeting minors. Although young children are exposed to many new advertising formats, parents find it appropriate to inform minors about the commercial intentions of advertising around 10 years of age. Further, parents argue that children are capable of understanding the advertising formats around the age of 12, and thus also find it ethical to use such formats when children are 12 to 13 years old.

Studies investigating children's advertising literacy, however, indicate that children are capable to process advertising and have a basic understanding (e.g., understanding selling intent) around the age of 8. The perceptions of parents on children's capabilities are more in line with the literature on children's advertising literacy in that at the age of 12 children do develop a more elaborate advertising literacy level (e.g. understanding persuasive intent). It is, however, very surprising that parents find it least necessary to inform children of integrated advertising formats, because all research shows how children are especially struggling with recognizing such formats as advertising and understanding the implicit mechanism of unconscious persuasion.

## 6. ADVERTISING PROFESSIONALS



by K. Daems & P. De Pelsmacker

Next to the parents, advertising professionals are an important stakeholder with regard to children and advertising. Our risk analysis includes one study addressing this stakeholder. A survey (N = 90) and qualitative (in-depth interviews, N = 10) study was used to map the perceptions of advertising professionals about the use of new advertising formats aimed at minors. During this study, it became clear that, overall, advertising professionals acknowledge that children are a vulnerable group for advertising. Further, the perceptions of advertising professionals about new advertising formats are very similar to those of parents: from the age of 12-13 years old onwards, advertisers perceive new advertising techniques as ethical to use towards minors; children should be made aware of the commercial intentions of advertising from the age of 9 to 10 onwards; they hold the opinion that on average children are unable to understand new advertising formats before the age of 12, but should be mature enough to identify and understand different advertising at age 12 and older. Online behavioral advertising, location based services and video advertising were considered the most difficult advertising formats for children and the least ethical to use.

## 7. ADVERTISING LITERACY IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES



by B. Adams, T. Schellens, & M. Valcke

To instil minors' advertising literacy, the role of education has been repeatedly stressed in literature. Therefore, we investigated how schools help children and teenagers to cope with new advertising formats. By analysing the curriculum, we found that the Flemish government did not formulate any curriculum standards for toddlers (<age 6); that two curriculum standards explicitly mention advertising in primary education (age 6 to 12); and that advertising literacy is also tackled in secondary education (age 12 to 18). Regarding to the latter, it is noticeable that references to advertising are mainly integrated into language curriculum standards (i.e., Dutch language). For both primary and secondary education, advertising literacy is also embedded in cross-curricular curriculum standards in a more implicit way. Aside from this, in the Flemish educational landscape, it is also important to take into account how the umbrella organizations (i.e. representative associations of school boards differing based on other ideological backgrounds) operationalize the generally formulated curriculum standards. In particular for primary education, it was noticeable that umbrella organisations aim to pay attention to minors' advertising literacy throughout the six years, but especially from the second grade (age 8 to 9). This finding is in line with previous research in which is stated that children from the age of eight have a more developed understanding of advertising. Additionally, there are primarily references to both traditional advertising formats and the cognitive dimension of advertising literacy in curricula for primary and secondary education. The latter is also advocated by International scholars who plea for reformulating the focus of advertising literacy education, because of the emphasis on cognitive advertising literacy.

Next to the exercises that are, conform the Flemish curriculum, integrated into text- and workbooks by educational publishers, there are also (inter)national organizations who develop stand-alone educational packages on advertising. An analysis of these educational packages (shows, inter alia, that they are mostly (1) providing guidance to teachers, (2) targeting children of primary education, and (3) rarely discussing new advertising formats. Moreover, to our knowledge, the effectiveness (i.e. whether educational materials positively influence minors' advertising literacy) of these educational packages is not tested until now. Therefore, the AdLit project seeks to obtain data which will help to address this research gap. Following the practical research methodology design-based research, multiple iterations (i.e. continuous cycles of investigation, development, testing and refinement) will be set up to determine the effectiveness of the learning material that we have developed based on suggestions of previous studies.

## 8. REGULATION AND SELF-REGULATION



by V. Verdoodt, P. Valcke, E. Lievens, & I. Lambrecht

The mapping of European and national legislative and self-regulatory provisions has confirmed that a myriad of obligations are imposed on advertisers, first and foremost with regard to the identification of commercial communications, but also with regard to the content of the commercial message. However, this does not mean that, automatically, the level of protection and empowerment of minors is high. First, both the legislative and self-regulatory principles are often formulated in a general or abstract manner (“commercial communications must be recognisable as such”), and guidelines for the implementation in practice thereof is often lacking. This leads to a situation where different methods, “labels” or “cues” are used by advertisers, across different media channels, which may be confusing for consumers, and especially for children. Second, certain definitions in legislative or self-regulatory instruments are formulated in a manner which leads to uncertainty as to its scope of application for new, digital advertising formats. Third, although different regulators (both government regulatory bodies, such as the Flemish Media Regulator, and self-regulatory bodies, such as the Jury for Ethical Practices in Advertising) are competent to enforce the existing provisions, in practice few decisions with regard to commercial communications, minors and new advertising formats have been issued in recent years. This provides both advertisers and researchers with little guidance on how the (often general) provisions should be implemented in practice. As indicated above, at the moment, it is unclear which reasons underlie this finding. Possible reasons could be a lack of awareness of citizens that complaints with regard to digital advertising formats may be submitted, for instance to the JEP; uncertainty for regulators whether specific rules are applicable to new advertising formats; lack of resources of regulators to instigate investigations on their own initiative; or compliance by advertisers.

With regard to advertising formats that collect and process children’s personal data, different legislative obligations and principles apply. First, there needs to be a legitimate ground for such processing, this means that there must be consent given, depending on the age of the child, by the parents or by both the parents and the child. From 25 May 2018, when the General Data Protection Regulation will apply in practice, processing data of children under a certain age (ranging from 13 to 16 years of age, depending on the choice made by the Member State in question) will only be possible when verifiable parental consent is obtained. Second, a number of principles must be adhered to: for instance, the personal data of children need to be processed fairly and lawfully, the data can only be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and must not further processed in a way incompatible with the initially specified purpose(s), and only adequate, relevant and non-excessive data can be collected and/or further processed. According to the ICC behavioural advertising should not be aimed at children under 12 years.

Finally, the application and enforcement of the existing legislative and self-regulatory provisions will always be assessed on a case-by-case basis: first, it will be determined whether a specific provision is applicable, and second, it will be determined whether the commercial message – the content, the identification or other elements – infringes the provision in question.



## 9. RISK ASSESSMENT

When putting together all the results of the different AdLit studies (measurement of minors' advertising literacy with the analysis of the Flemish curriculum and parents' and ad professionals' perceptions of advertising), we come to the following conclusion and risk assessment.

Television commercials pose a lower risk for minors as they are clearly distinguished from media content and labelled as commercial content. Moreover, many schools learn children how to cope with these commercials from the age of eight. However, this is on an ad hoc basis in different courses and not yet integrated in the end goals.

The more embedded and hybrid advertising formats pose a greater threat. Not only because schools do not yet learn children how to cope with these formats, minors also have less experience with them and they are not clearly indicated as advertising. In addition, parents' knowledge of these embedded formats is rather limited and they rarely discuss these advertising formats with their children. Accordingly, we can conclude that the risk assessment for these embedded and hybrid advertising formats is high. In particular, we found that while children have a moderate advertising literacy level for banners; the advertising literacy level for brand integration, advertiser funded programs, social media advertising and advergames is rather low, posing a greater risk for children and teenagers.

Not only for traditional television commercials, but also for the embedded and hybrid formats, results reveal that children are better able to recognize the ad format and understand its persuasive intent when they grow older. However, this is not the case for affective and moral advertising literacy which appeared to be rather low when minors were exposed to specific advertising formats. This may pose a risk, especially for teens since parents and advertising professionals think that teenagers from the age of 12-13 are capable of understanding advertising formats and critically reflecting on them.

### NEED FOR INITIATIVES

This risk assessment shows the need for initiatives to improve children's and teenagers' advertising literacy for new advertising formats. AdLit suggests an all-round approach in which minors are stimulated to develop their advertising literacy by their environment. An all-round approach suggests including minors' immediate environment (i.e. parents and schools) and their non-immediate environment (i.e. advertising professionals and policy makers). In the risk analysis, we therefore, also took into account the perceptions of parents, educators, advertising professionals and policy makers. To conclude this report, we will discuss the future policy guidelines.



## 10. POLICY GUIDELINES TO EMPOWER MINORS TO COPE WITH HYBRID ADVERTISING



The AdLit project aims to **empower minors to cope with embedded and hybrid advertising**. In particular, children and youngsters need to develop a high level of advertising literacy as this implies that they recognize and understand advertising, embrace a critical and nuanced attitude, are capable of formulating and expressing a (moral) judgment, and activate the knowledge and processing skills when needed. Therefore, we formulate different actions that are needed to empower minors. Along this line it is important to note that the AdLit project strongly focusses on the effects of advertising format (e.g. difference in advertising literacy towards TV advertisement and advergames). However, knowledge on the persuasive tactics used within each of the formats (e.g., celebrity endorsement or emotional tactics) is also a crucial part of advertising literacy and future studies should therefore take the impact of advertising tactics into account.

### DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVERTISING DISCLOSURE

Recognition is a first and indispensable facet in the effective coping with advertising. The risk analysis, however, showed that this recognition is difficult for advertising formats that are fully embedded in the media content (e.g., product placement) or interactively engage children with the commercial content (e.g., advertgames). Accordingly, AdLit suggests to develop an advertising disclosure that helps minors to recognize advertising. This is particularly important for the integrated and interactive advertising formats.

AdLit will conduct research on how this disclosure should look like (**form**), when it should be placed (**timing**) and what the **content** should be. It is important that the meaning of the disclosure is clear for all minors and that the same or a similar disclosure is used for all advertising formats targeting children. Next to **facilitating ad recognition**, this disclosure should help children **triggering the dispositional advertising literacy**. Therefore, in educational packages, the disclosure should be linked to implementation intentions, or if-then rules. This could entail simple rules for the young children and more sophisticated rules for the older ones. These rules should help them select the appropriate coping strategy.

## INCREASING GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF ADVERTISING AMONG MINORS

To be able to effectively cope with advertising, it is important that minors develop an extensive dispositional advertising literacy. We underline the importance of all aspects of this dispositional advertising literacy: the **cognitive, moral and affective subdimension**. One possibility to increase children's dispositional advertising literacy is through the educational system. Previously, education did not pay attention to new advertising media formats. Currently AdLit is **developing and testing educational packages**, for both primary and secondary schools to increase children's advertising literacy. In the development of educational packages, the living environment of children and adolescents will be taken into account. Therefore, other new advertising formats will be mentioned in educational packages for primary and secondary education. Whereas especially advertising in games seems to be important in learning material for primary education, the focus in secondary education will be on social media advertising. These materials will also support teachers by supplying them with knowledge on how to empower minors. Unlike past educational programs on advertising literacy, these packages will not only pay attention to the cognitive advertising literacy subdimension, but also to the affective and moral dimension of advertising literacy. This latter implies that minors learn how advertising affects them and how they can regulate these emotions and help them to judge the fairness of advertising techniques. Further, it is crucial to **train children's coping skills**, by letting them practice. This practice will help them build their dispositional advertising literacy and select the right coping tactics when confronted with advertising. In addition, our research revealed that children are under the impression that if they did not see the brand, that they are not influenced by advertising. It is important that they are aware that this is not the case.

However, it is also crucial to target the minors **out of this school context** and create awareness and knowledge on the topic in a playful and fun manner. In this respect, AdLit already developed **two serious mini-game platforms** to help children and youngsters cope with advertising and develop their dispositional advertising literacy. In addition, **awareness campaigns** will be developed, in cooperation with vloggers to raise awareness on advertising literacy among children and youngsters.

## INCREASING PARENT'S ADVERTISING LITERACY AND THEIR PARENTAL MEDIATION

Our findings suggest that parents are knowledgeable about most new advertising formats. However, they indicate that their knowledge of advergames is rather low. Currently only the advertising literacy of parents of children younger than 12 years old was examined. Hence, further AdLit research should examine the level of advertising literacy of parents of youngsters. They are more exposed to social media advertising and behavioral targeting giving their more

extensive online media consumption. In general, AdLit aims to **increase the level of advertising literacy of parents**. In addition, increasing the awareness of the importance of advertising literacy and its different dimensions will be crucial to stimulate parents to talk about advertising in general and the specific advertising formats with their children. This type of active parental mediation will increase the role of the parents as socialization agents to educate their children to become critical consumers.

The results of the AdLit studies show however, that parents are not always that critical towards advertising themselves. They mainly try to avoid advertising, or emphasizes the negative aspects of advertising without explaining the underlying intentions, or the persuasive strategies used when discussing it with their children. Therefore, the AdLit researchers need to **stress the importance of parental mediation**. By developing specific guidelines parents might be stimulated to discuss advertising strategies more in depth, focusing on the different dimensions of advertising literacy (cognitive, affective and moral). In addition, they need to be triggered to talk about the new, integrated advertising formats.

AdLit is currently using a series of serious games which parents can play together with their children, and stimulate both parental advertising literacy as their children's advertising literacy. The launch of these serious games was supported by a series of information flyers explaining new advertising formats and tips and tricks for parents on how to discuss advertising with their children. Both games as flyers are being distributed to parents and children by stakeholders linked to the AdLit project. Further initiatives will be developed to **educate parents about the importance of advertising literacy and increase their advertising literacy level**. Awareness campaigns will motivate parents to take up their role as consumer socialization agents. Further, they need information about potential complain procedures and how they should start such procedure and which organization is responsible for the follow-up on this.

## INCREASING AWARENESS AMONG ADVERTISING PROFESSIONALS

Compared to adults, children are less skilled to judge the fairness of advertising (i.e. moral advertising literacy). Therefore, we want to make a plea for "**ethical and transparent advertising**" instead of covert marketing techniques. Advertising professionals do not act as socialization agents and are not a part of the children's immediate environment. Nevertheless, they are responsible for which advertising information reaches the children and how this information is distributed. If advertisers use advertising formats that are more clearly understandable for children, then children will be more capable to make informed consumers decisions.

In addition, the mapping of the legal framework showed that there is both legislation and self- and co- regulation at different levels (international, European, national, regional, etc.) related to embedded and hybrid advertising targeting minors. For advertising professionals, it is difficult to see the forest for the trees. It is therefore, important to give them a **clear overview of the legal**

and self-regulatory framework. AdLit already developed a short one-pager with an overview of the most important laws in this context. However, there is a need for a legal vademecum that bundles all the guidelines.

## POLICY MAKERS AND REGULATORY BODIES

As mentioned, policy makers and regulatory bodies have issued different sets of rules with regard to commercial communication aimed at minors. However, this does not automatically lead to a high level of protection and empowerment of minors.

First of all, more awareness is needed among citizens regarding the available complaint mechanisms. Policy makers and regulatory bodies should provide citizens with clear and accessible information on how to file complaints against unlawful digital advertising formats. Second, a better coordination between existing regulatory bodies, i.e. the Jury for Ethical Practices in Advertising, the Flemish Media Regulator and even the Privacy Commission (for instance in relation to behavioural advertising) is needed. Through improved dialogue and joint consultations, more concrete guidelines and common recommendations on the implementation of the often general or abstract principles of the regulatory framework and their application to new advertising formats could be developed. Finally, more empirical research on the effect of advertising cues on minors is needed before such a measure could be embedded into the legal or self- and co-regulatory framework on commercial communication.

## Conclusion

To empower children, teenagers and vulnerable audiences, both the immediate surrounding (parents and children) and non-immediate surroundings (policy makers and advertising professionals) should take action to increase minor's advertising literacy towards new media formats. The following two years, AdLit will work on initiatives involving not only children, teenagers and vulnerable minors, but also parents, advertising professionals, educational professionals, policy makers and all other stakeholders able to empower children's advertising literacy.

This document forms part of the 'AdLit' (Advertising Literacy) research project. AdLit is a four-year interdisciplinary research project on advertising literacy, which is funded by Vlaio (Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology). The main goal of the AdLit project is to investigate how we can empower children and youth to cope with advertising, so that they can grow up to be critical, informed consumers who make their own conscious choices in today's new media environment.

The AdLit consortium comprises of the following **partners**:

University of Ghent: Research group CEPEC, Department Education

University of Antwerp: Research group MIOS and Department Marketing

KU Leuven Research group Centre for IT and IP Law (CiTiP)

Free University Brussels: Research group CEMESO

**For more information** in relation to the project, visit our website ([www.AdLit.be](http://www.AdLit.be)) or visit us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/reclamewijs](https://www.facebook.com/reclamewijs)) or Twitter (@AdLitSBO).

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