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Social Media Use and Adolescents' Levels of Advertising Literacy

ABSTRACT

Advertising literacy is a set of knowledge, abilities and skills enabling one to identify and comprehend advertised messages. The theoretical part of the paper brings various points of view on advertising literacy (which we comprehend to be an element of media literacy), its classification and basic levels. The aim of the paper is to identify the level of advertising literacy among adolescents. The research has been conducted on a sample of 348 youngsters aged 13 to 17 years old. The authors of the paper investigated the influence of age on advertising literacy in the process of identifying intent of advertisement on the social network *Instagram* utilising new formats of digital communication such as reels, stories and memes. The authors of the paper tend to admit that the age of respondents may have an influence on adolescents' advertising literacy but to finally claim so, further research with respondents from larger age groups would have to be conducted.

KEY WORDS

Adolescents. Media Literacy. Advertising. Advertising Literacy. Marketing Communication. Advertising. Native Advertising. Groundswell. Critical Thinking. Online and Offline Communication. Social Media.

Introduction

The main part of the study aims at the analysis of the advertising literacy of adolescents, focusing especially on advertising literacy on social networks. Apart from having a look at related literature, we examined the knowledge, abilities and skills of adolescents related to advertising on the Internet and how adolescents deal with advertisements on social networks, especially those on Instagram. We linked our research to that of Vrabec whom examined the advertising literacy of our generation back in 2007. Vrabec's research was oriented on offline media, mainly advertising in print and on TV. In the past 15 years, the influence of social media has been on the rise, becoming more and more influential. Strategies and tactics being used by social media are more elaborate than ever before. Adolescents regularly come into contact with targeted advertising which matches their hobbies and characteristics and also responds to their buying behaviour.

The tracking, profiling and targeting practices that enable personalisation are sophisticated and opaque, and as such, can inhibit adolescents' ability to understand these commercial practices, or make critical decisions about their privacy and personal.¹ We examined the level of advertising literacy of adolescents related to new digital formats on Instagram. We examined adolescents' ability to identify and comprehend advertising. We also investigated if adolescents pay attention to photos on Instagram and if so, how much. Then we investigated whether they are able to differentiate between paid and unpaid content on social networks. We also focused our attention on native advertising in cases of which it is extremely difficult to identify the hidden advertising message.

Statistics from the company *Meta* show² that in January 2022, there were 1.55 million users of in Slovakia. The figure shows that 28.4% of the total Slovak population is impacted by Instagram's advertising. As Instagram limits usage of the platform by age and its users must be aged 13 years and older, it is useful to acknowledge that the previously mentioned figure represents 32.8% of entitled users in Slovakia. Another important piece of information to be mentioned is that at the beginning of 2022, the advertising impact of Instagram in Slovakia was represented by 31.5% of local internet users' base (irrespective of age). At the beginning of 2022, the ratio of advertising audience was represented by 54.2% of men as opposed to 45.8% of women. 72% of adolescents are users of the social network Instagram.

1 Theoretical Background to Advertising Literacy Focusing on Advertising Literacy among Adolescents

Advertising literacy is one of the basic elements in the entire set of media literacy package. Advertising literacy is viewed as the ability to comprehend advertising content, to identify it and unveil its intent as well as the ability to resist it. The aim of the communication strategies of companies is to communicate in a way in which advertising is not recognised or identified. Especially in the digital environment, advertising literacy may be significantly limited. According to Verdoodt³ the commercial intent of digital advertising is often unclear because the advertising message is fully embedded in the entertaining content.

¹ VERDOODT, V., LIEVENS, E.: Targeting Children with Personalised Advertising. In VERMEULEN, G., LIEVENS, E. (eds.): *Data Protection and Privacy under Pressure, Transatlantic Tensions, EU Surveillance, and Big Data*. Antwerp, Apeldoorn, Portland : Maklu, 2017, p. 330.

² Digital 2022: Slovakia. [online]. [2022-08-10]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-slovakia>>.

³ VERDOODT, V.: *Children's Rights and Advertising Literacy in the Digital Era: Towards an Empowering Regulatory Framework for Commercial Communication*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Ghent : Ghent University, 2018, p. 12.

Native advertising, visually as well as functionally embedded in the Internet environment, is often such a case. The advertiser buys and uses the distribution channel of third party - media, platforms and social networks.⁴ Native advertising in the online environment may be in the form of PR articles, interviews, blogs and podcasts. According to Hudáková⁵, the promotion of a trademark by means of influencers is the most popular native advertising. Three important characteristics of these new advertising formats are the following: longer exposure time to commercial content, integration of commercial content into the media content and interactive engagement of the user with the advertising content.⁶

The most common native advertising in the offline environment comes in form of product placement, sponsoring or paid advertisements and paid interviews in the press.

The boundaries between commercial and non-commercial online content (e.g. information or entertainment are blurred⁷). Naturally, the lowest level of advertising literacy is attributed to children and seniors.

The main concern is that if consumers do not recognise the commercial intent of advertising, they are unlikely to activate their advertising literacy (i.e., their general understanding of advertising's persuasive intent and their skeptical attitude towards advertising). Activation of advertising literacy is important when processing an advertisement because it can help the consumers to critically evaluate and cope with these types of advertising messages.⁸ Various studies have already shown that new advertising formats can generate more positive brand attitudes and purchase requests compared to traditional formats, especially in the case of children and teenagers.⁹

A great amount of non-formal outcomes, especially online, cannot be managed by the selling company itself. As the influence of social media is always on the rise, well-deserved attention should be paid to these non-formal outcomes as these have become important players having great influence on buying behaviour and decision-making. It is even more difficult to identify and comprehend the content of this type of advertising. According to Čábyová¹⁰,

⁴ KUNA, F. et al.: *Obsah, ktorý ľudia milujú*. Bratislava : Združenie pre internetovú reklamu IAB Slovakia, 2018, p. 13. [online]. [2022-09-01]. Available at: <https://prirucka.iabslovakia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/prirucka_nativnej_reklamy.pdf>.

⁵ See: HUDÁKOVÁ, V.: Reklamná gramotnosť generácie Z. In *QUAERE 2022*, Hradec Králové : Magnanimitas, 2022, p. 67-76.

⁶ See: ROZENDAAL, E., BUIJZEN, M., VALKENBURG, P. M.: Think-aloud Process Superior to Thought-listing in Increasing Children's Critical Processing of Advertising. In *Human Communication Research*, 2012, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 200-203, p. 199-221.

⁷ See: WOJDYNSKI, B. W., EVANS, N. J.: Going Native: Effects of Disclosure Position and Language on the Recognition and Evaluation of Online Native Advertising. In *Journal of Advertising*, 2016, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2016, p. 158.; CAMPBELL, C., EVANS, N. J.: The Role of a Companion Banner and Sponsorship Transparency in Recognizing and Evaluating Article-style Native Advertising. In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2018, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 18.

⁸ See: WRIGHT, P., FRIESTAD, M., BOUSH, D. M.: The Development of Marketplace Persuasion Knowledge in Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults. In *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 2005, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 224.; ZABUZHANSKA, I., MARTOVIČ, M., HEKELJ, M.: Audiobranding in American and Slovak Telecommunications Advertising: A Linguistic Standpoint. In *Lege Artis. Language Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 2022, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 267-304.

⁹ HUDDERS, L. et al.: Children's Advertising Literacy for New Advertising Formats: The Mediating Impact of Advertising Literacy on the (Un)Intended Effects of Advergaming and Advertising Funded Programs. In VERLEGH, P., VOORVELD, H., EISEND, M. (eds.): *Advances in Advertising Research. European Advertising Academy*. Springer Gabler : Wiesbaden, 2015, Vol. 6, p. 18.; See also: SALIM, N. A. M., ABDULLAH, M. Y.: Measuring Reliability and Validity of Instrument: The Dimensions of Advertising Literacy in Determining the Advertising Literacy Index. In *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 2017, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 285.; PASHANK, N., TABIBI, S. J., A., FARHANGI, A. A.: Defining Factors Influencing Advertising Literacy of Iranian Visual Media Directors. In *Communication Research*, 2018, Vol. 25, No. 93, p. 108.

¹⁰ ČÁBYOVÁ, L.: The Role of Blogs in the Communication of Ecological Topics. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: New Changers, New Challenges*: Conference Proceedings from the International Scientific Conference 9th November 2021 online. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2021, p. 88.

non-formal outcomes are all the references to a company in comments sections as well as in discussion forums, blogs and reviews. Posting videos, parodies of commercial spots on YouTube or podcasts are also types of non-formal outcomes. This phenomenon is not a novelty, though. Unregulated and uncontrolled flows of information have been present in advertising ever since or even before the invention of the Internet in the form of oral advertising, rumours or gossips. Word of mouth (WOM) is defined by Blackwell as “the informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions, and information between two people, neither one of which is a marketer.”¹¹ Nowadays, the flow of information has been displaced into the online environment, namely social media, where it is a lot quicker to spread information that reaches bigger numbers of potential customers. Li and Bernoff named these communication tools the “groundswell”.¹²

Advertising literacy is a set of knowledge, abilities and skills of an individual enabling them to comprehend an advertisement, its content and intent.¹³ Friestad and Wright¹⁴ differentiate between factual and procedural knowledge. Factual knowledge (also known as declarative) relates to knowing the content of advertising communication. Procedural knowledge is derived from existing factual knowledge and relates to the ability of comprehending the way by means of which the advertising message is delivered. Most of the studies related to research of the advertising literacy of adolescents rarely differentiate between the above mentioned 2 types of knowledge. Therefore it is needed to take into consideration up-to-date outcomes of research related to the advertising literacy of children which is above all focused on the importance of understanding the difference in knowledge classification. Waiguny, Nelson and Terlutter¹⁵ explicitly differentiate between dispositional (factual knowledge) and situational (procedural knowledge) advertising literacy.

Rozendaal et al. proposed a three-dimensional concept of advertising literacy. As such, each dimension consists of several sub-dimensions.¹⁶ The first dimension corresponds to conceptual advertising literacy (both the ability to identify an advertisement and to comprehend advertised messages); the second is admitting advertising literacy (the critical attitude towards advertisement belongs here) and the third dimension is literacy performance (which stands for the ability to utilise conceptual advertising knowledge while being confronted with advertisement. To put it straight, it refers to the way we use our knowledge about advertising while the advertising is active and we are its recipient).

Hudder et al.¹⁷ speak of three general dimensions of advertising literacy: cognitive advertising literacy, affective advertising literacy and moral advertising literacy. Cognitive advertising literacy comprises the ability to identify an advertisement, to comprehend the selling and persuasive intent as well as to be able to differentiate persuasive technique, to identify the advertiser (as the source of advertising) and identify the target group of such an advertisement. Affective advertising literacy is then viewed as the ability to withhold an effective attitude towards advertisement and individual advertising formats. Moral advertising

¹¹ BLACKWELL, R. D., MINIARD, P. W., ENGEL, J. F.: *Consumer Behavior*. Mason, OH : South-Western, 2001, p. 404.

¹² LI, CH., BERNOFF, J.: *Spodná vlna*. Bratislava : Eastone Books, 2008, p. 11.

¹³ BOUSH, D. M., FRIESTAD, M., ROSE, G. M: Adolescent Skepticism Toward TV Advertising and Knowledge of Advertiser Tactics. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1994, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 168.

¹⁴ FRIESTAD, M., WRIGHT, P.: The Persuasion Knowledge Model – How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1994, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 19.

¹⁵ See: WAIGUNY, M. K. J., NELSON, M. R., TERLUTTER, R.: Entertainment Matters! The Relationship Between Challenge and Persuasiveness of an Advergame for Children. In *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 2012, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 72-73.

¹⁶ See: ROZENDAAL, E., LAPIERRE, M. A., VAN REIJMERSDAL, E. A., BUIJZEN, M.: Reconsidering Advertising Literacy as a Defense Against Advertising Effects. In *Media Psychology*, 2011, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 335-336.

¹⁷ HUDDERS, L. et al.: Children's Advertising Literacy in a New Media Environment: An Introduction to the AdLit Research Project. In *Etmaal van de Communicatiewetenschappen 2015, Proceedings*. Antwerp : Universiteit Gent, 2015, p. 116.

literacy stands for the process of moral (ethical) examination of advertising formats, tactics and advertising messages. Legislative knowledge from media and advertising backgrounds, knowledge of consumer law, as well as evaluation of values, norms (such as manipulation, fair play, rightness) are part of this dimension, too.

Malmelin works with the four dimensional concept of advertising literacy.¹⁸ He perceives information literacy, promotional literacy, aesthetic (visual) literacy and rhetorical literacy to be the main parts forming one's advertising literacy. Information literacy is the ability to find and process information, judge its rightness, be able to identify false news and misinformation. Promotional literacy stands for the art of being able to attract one's attention, to sell, to persuade and to enthuse over the product and its ownership. This literacy helps a person to critically evaluate the influence of advertising, its functions, content, and objectivity and to unveil pressure tactics in communication. Aesthetic literacy comprises the ability to appreciate art, to comprehend beauty, to perceive it by means of various senses and to understand the concept of images. Aesthetic illiteracy is then understood as the inability to interpret visual images. Rhetorical literacy is linked in marketing communication to the art of persuasion, argumentation and presentation.

Even though in Slovakia the topic of media literacy is processed in detail and enough attention is paid to it, the topic of advertising literacy is not processed so well and research is lacking. Advertising literacy is processed in the work of Vrabec¹⁹ who examined the ability of adolescents to recognise manipulative elements in advertising. The author of the paper from 2008 found that adolescents have issues in differentiating between reality and illusion in advertisements. Vrabec claims that individuals had trouble identifying that advertisements do not depict reality but illusion and that various manipulative techniques and strategies are used. Vrabec's research proved that *"young people naturally have certain level of resistance to manipulative elements used in media communication however they cannot, in its complexity, critically analyse strategies and techniques used to gain viewer's attention and buying behaviour"*.²⁰ Petranová²¹ deals with media literacy in her research and examines the ability to identify the influence of advertising, hidden advertisement, product placement and knowledge of rules and norms regulating advertisements.²²

Báčová a Holevová²³ examine advertising literacy in terms of how knowledge of advertising influences subsequent evaluation of advertisements. Advertising literacy is in these terms understood as the ability to critically evaluate a commercial, judge its individual functions, the ability to unveil negative impacts of commercials and to resist them. According to the authors, critical thinking is the most basic element of advertising literacy. Dzurová et al.²⁴, as well as Korčoková²⁵ examine advertising literacy from the consumer's literacy perspective. Generally speaking, advertising literacy is rather a borderline topic of media literacy.

¹⁸ MALMELIN, N.: What Is Advertising Literacy? Exploring the Dimensions of Advertising Literacy. In *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 2010, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 132.

¹⁹ See: VRABEC, N.: *Mládež a média – mediálna gramotnosť mladých ľudí na Slovensku*. Bratislava : IUVENTA – Slovenský inštitút mládeže, 2008, p. 13-25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²¹ PETRANOVÁ, D.: Úroveň mediálnej gramotnosti slovenských seniorov. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 73.

²² Compare with: ŠKRIPCOVÁ, L.: Media Literacy in Digital Games. In *Media Literacy Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 136-138.; CHELLASAMY, A. et al.: Social Media Disengagement Among Gen Y and Gen Z: a Quantitative Investigation. In *Media Literacy Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No.1, p. 233-234.

²³ See: BAČOVÁ, V., HOLEVOVÁ, B.: Zvyšovanie citlivosti na pôsobenie reklamy. In HUMPOLÍČEK, P., SVOBODA, M., BLATNÝ M. (eds.): *Sociální procesy a osobnost 2007*. Brno : MSD, 2007, p. 20-21.

²⁴ DZUROVÁ, M. et al.: *Gramotný spotrebiteľ. Zborník vedeckých štúdií*. Bratislava : EUBA, 2016, p. 198.

²⁵ KORČOKOVÁ, M.: Gramotný spotrebiteľ. In *Studia Commercialia Bratislavensia*, 2017, p. 158. [online]. [2022-05-17]. Available at: <https://of.euba.sk/www_write/files/veda-vyskum/scb/vydane-cisla/2017-02/scb0217-korcokova.pdf>.

This study and related research is aimed at adolescents aged 13 to 17. There are two reasons for choosing this age group sample. First, we suppose that these adolescents are somewhere in the final stage of their cognitive development and are still learning cognitive skills which may influence their behaviour.²⁶ This implies that socialisation of consumers and related skills in advertising literacy can be developed even during their adolescence.²⁷ That would be in direct opposition to the research of Rozendaal et al.²⁸ who supposed that advertising literacy develops only between the ages of 8 to 12. The research has been doubted by Verhellenom et al.²⁹ who suggested that older age groups should also be examined.

Second, advertising aimed at adolescents takes place in the online environment in which advertising overlaps with entertainment. This strong integration of advertisements can make it difficult for adolescents to comprehend the intent of advertising³⁰ compared to more traditional forms of commercials.

Even though there has been conducted quite a profound research related to media literacy of children and adolescents, there still remain unanswered questions related to the advertising literacy of adolescents confronted with digital interactive advertising formats and how adolescents react to advertising tactics hidden in various formats of advertised messages.

In the profound research of Vrabec,³¹ the author dealt with the advertising literacy of children at primary and secondary schools and at universities. Vrabec exposed all the young people to the text of a fictional advertisement. 88% of high school students and 82% of elementary school students detected the communication intent of the advertisement. University students, being exposed to a more complicated assignment and more challenging tasks could not unveil the real intent of the advertisement. Only 24% of university students managed to identify the intent of the advertisement compared to 76% who were wrong. It is also important to note that 60% of respondents understood that advertisements are not a true mirror to reality and that the commercial creators utilise various strategies to influence the consumer. Being able to identify advertising strategies became one of the main components of advertising literacy. The research showed that more than half of youngsters in Slovakia had reached basic advertising literacy.

De Jans, Hudders and Cauberghe³² conducted research in which they pointed out that young people suppose that they are advertising literate, however, young people are not as advertising literate as they believe. In their research aimed at advertising literacy, the authors also confirmed that advertising literacy increases with people's age. This means that the most vulnerable groups are children, subsequently teenagers and young people. The authors also claim that with increasing age, a person's resentment towards advertising increases, too, and that they feel the need to avoid it. The research has also shown that cognitive advertising literacy among young people is quite high, reaching 50%.

²⁶ BLAKEMORE, S. J., CHOUDHURY, S.: Development of the Adolescent Brain: Implications for Executive Function and Social Cognition. In *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2006, Vol. 47, No. 3-4, p. 297.

²⁷ See: MOSES, L. J., BALDWIN, D. A.: What Can the Study of Cognitive Development Reveal about Children's Ability to Appreciate and Cope with Advertising? In *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 2005, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 186-201.

²⁸ See: ROZENDAAL, E., BUIJZEN, M., VALKENBURG, P.: Comparing Children's and Adults' Cognitive Advertising Competences in the Netherlands. In *Journal of Children and Media*, 2010, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 78-80.

²⁹ See: VERHELLEN, Y., OATES, C., DE PELSMACKER, P., DENS, N.: Children's Responses to Traditional Versus Hybrid Advertising Formats: The Moderating Role of Persuasion Knowledge. In *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 2014, Vol. 37, No. 2, p. 235-255.

³⁰ See: VERHELLEN, Y., OATES, C., DE PELSMACKER, P., DENS, N.: Children's Responses to Traditional Versus Hybrid Advertising Formats: The Moderating Role of Persuasion Knowledge. In *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 2014, Vol. 37, No. 2, p. 235-255.

³¹ See: VRABEC, N.: *Mládež a médiá: Mediálna gramotnosť mladých ľudí na Slovensku*. Bratislava: IUVENTA, 2008, p. 30-31.

³² See: DE JANS, S., HUDDERS, L., CAUBERGHE, V.: Adolescents' Self-reported Level of Dispositional Advertising Literacy: How Do Adolescents Resist Advertising in the Current Commercial Media Environment? In *Young Consumers*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 4, p. 402-420.

Van Reijmersdal et al. examined how adolescents comprehend advertisements. They focused their attention especially on sponsoring in TV, whether adolescents pay attention to tagging the sponsors on TV and if they comprehend that they become subjects of advertising. The research in 2017 comprised 221 students and the results were compared with those of adults. After all, advertising literacy of adolescents (young people) became the subject of the research, too, as a side outcome. The research has proven that young people, in comparison to adults, pay more attention to tags of sponsors or products in programmes. On the other hand, even though young people acknowledged the presence of sponsoring in a programme, they do not tend to be more critical towards the commercial. Unlike adults, who are more cautious.³³ This statement supports the authors De Jans, Hudders and Cauberghe who believe that with increasing age, advertising literacy also increases.

Advertising literacy has also been examined in some detail by Dutch academics. They examined native advertising and activation of advertising literacy while watching vlogs. This topic is very important as adolescents spend most of their free time on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube and they watch videos of their favourite influencers. The behaviour of young people is a well-known topic of businesses, too, as they try to present their products by means of influencers and influencers' YT channels. In March 2020, research was conducted on a sample of 251 young people (teenagers). The results of the research showed that young people watching vlogs do not pay attention to the sponsor's tags. These tags do not initiate critical thinking in connection with such a commercial. Even if their critical thinking mode is not activated, teenagers easily identify the sponsored product. This proved that in order to activate advertising literacy, young people do not need to be notified of a commercial upfront as they are able to identify it while watching Internet content. The study also managed to find that once the intent of the research was unveiled, the respondents succeeded to identify the advertisement straight forwardly. This finding proves that schooling and education in advertising and marketing may lead to increased levels of advertising literacy. In attitudinal advertising literacy, the research showed that increases in advertising literacy lead to negative attitudes towards the brand.³⁴ This corresponds with the outcomes of De Jans, Hudders and Cauberghe's research.

Swaney et al.³⁵ executed a qualitative study on the sample of 29 adolescents aged 15 to 17. They wanted to examine the moral advertising literacy of the participants, in specific, how they evaluate if the marketing influencer is fair and if the commercial is appropriate. The findings suggest that even though the respondents were critical and skeptical towards influencers in general (corresponding with respondents' dispositional advertising literacy), they were positive towards the specific advertising content (corresponding with situational literacy), mostly thanks to the parasocial relationship between an influencer and their follower. As such, this research implies the difference between moral advertising literacy of adolescents in general influencers' marketing context on one side, and corresponding willingness to apply this critical reflection on popular influencers on the other. The results of the research confirmed Van Dam and Van Reijmersdal's outcomes³⁶ that teenagers can perceive strong parasocial relationships with influencers, frequently regarding them as being akin to a friend.

³³ See: VAN REIJMERSDAL, E. A. et al.: This Is Advertising! Effects of Disclosing Television Brand Placement on Adolescents. In *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2017, Vol. 46, No. 2, p. 328-342.

³⁴ HOEK, R. W. et al: Testing the Effectiveness of a Disclosure in Activating Children's Advertising Literacy in the Context of Embedded Advertising in Vlogs. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 10.

³⁵ See: SWEENEY, E., LAWLOR, M. A., BRADY, M.: Teenagers' Moral Advertising Literacy in an Influencer Marketing Context. In *International Journal of Advertising*, 2021, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 54-77.

³⁶ See: VAN REIJMERSDAL, E., VAN DAM, S.: How Age and Disclosures of Sponsored Influencer Videos Affect Adolescents' Knowledge of Persuasion and Persuasion. In *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2020, Vol. 49, No. 7, p. 1531-1544.

2 Supporting Material and Methodology

The article focuses on the advertising literacy of adolescents, more precisely on adolescents' ability to identify and comprehend advertisements in online environments, especially on the social network Instagram. The main aim of the article is to identify the level of advertising literacy of adolescents. Based on this targeted aim, primary as well as secondary sources were used. The secondary sources were applied in the process of gathering theoretical data from both Slovak and foreign literature. The most helpful were the studies of the following authors: Rozendaal, Campbell and Swaney. Of the Slovak authors, Vrabec was the most influential. As the topic of advertising literacy does not resonate much in academic databases, we considered gathering our own data on the topic and its subsequent evaluation to be the best approach. Our primary source was research executed by means of an electronic survey, so-called CAWI – computer assisted web interviewing.

Having in mind a targeted age group of adolescents from 13 to 17, we considered an electronic survey to be the most effective way of questioning as well as the most attractive, simple and natural for the chosen age group. An electronic survey was created and distributed via the platform Survio. Survio is a tool created to measure consumers' satisfaction, to evaluate company's employees, to run marketing research or other surveys and polls.

In the survey, there were specific images of the most popular formats on Instagram at present: Reels, meme and stories.³⁷ The images were chosen from those already published on Instagram and our respondents might have already seen them. We wanted to use images and videos that would be attractive for our respondents.

The survey was launched on the 7th of June 2022 and lasted until the 6th of July 2022, an overall period of 30 days. The survey was presented to students of two primary schools, one secondary school and a high school. To remain objective in the process of evaluation of adolescents' advertising literacy in Slovakia, we chose schools from various geographical locations. The chosen schools represented the western, central and eastern regions of Slovakia.

The survey was executed on a sample of 348 respondents aged 13 to 17 from various regions of Slovakia. 63.2% of respondents were women and 33% men, 3.8% of respondents were not willing to claim their sex or ticked their sex as "Other". The respondents' age structure was as follows: 13.8% respondents were aged 13 years, 17.5% aged 14, 24.7% aged 15, the biggest group – 31.9% of respondents aged 16 years and the least numerous group aged 17 years, 12.1%. Taking into account the set goal (to acknowledge the level of advertising literacy of adolescents), we created a set of questions accompanied by real post images to examine respondents' ability to identify and comprehend an advertisement.

Thanks to the practical examples in the questions we examined:

- respondent's ability to differentiate commercials from common content on the social network Instagram,
- respondent's ability to comprehend the message advertised by the advertiser in the advertisement.

In the course of evaluation of survey results, we consulted the work of Petranová³⁸ who had examined media literacy of seniors. Similarly to Petranová, we attributed points to individuals for responses to questions asked in the survey. If the respondent chose the right answer,

³⁷ Note of the authors: Reels is a fun format of short videos that use music, effects or stickers. By reels, companies can creatively present themselves to their customers. A meme is a viral format, usually humorous, in which authors try to make a strong point. A meme picture is most often created from a funny picture, which the author completes with his own text. An Instagram story is a 24-hour post on an Instagram profile that can take the form of a picture, video, or thought. If users highlight it, it will not disappear after the whole day, but will remain visible in the profile.

³⁸ PETRANOVÁ, D.: Úroveň mediálnej gramotnosti slovenských seniorov. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 73.

identified the commercial and comprehended it well, the adolescent was attributed 1 point. If the commercial was not identified or the message was not comprehended, the respondent was attributed 0 points. A detailed list of all questions asked may be found in the following chapter dealing with survey results.

The final evaluation consisted of adding up the points and counting an arithmetic median which resulted in the specification of the level of advertising literacy among the questioned adolescents. We also evaluated the level of advertising literacy for each surveyed age group separately: 13 years old, 14, 15, 16 and 17 year old adolescents. We applied the same approach to the evaluation of separate age groups as we did to the evaluation of adolescents as a general group of youngsters.

The final level of advertising literacy was divided into 3 groups, similar to Petranová's research:

- Basic level – an individual reaches a basic knowledge of advertising, knows basic forms of advertising (e.g. TV commercials, promotion or billboards) and they know how to differentiate one from the other. A person having a basic level of advertising literacy does not think of advertising furthermore, they neither read the texts of the post nor pay attention to the advertising tags.
- Medium level – an individual has at their disposal competencies at the medium level of advertising literacy, such as being able to recognise a commercial, to comprehend an advertising message but not on all occasions and not always in the right way. More complex advertising formats, such as native advertisements, are not easy to be identified by the respondent who also pays little attention to advertising tags.
- Advanced level – an individual has enough knowledge and abilities about advertising strategies, they know various forms of advertisements and that makes it easy for the respondent to differentiate between them and comprehend it in the right way. The respondent is interested in the content they see and they pay attention to advertising tags. Buying behaviour of the respondent is not significantly influenced by commercials as they can evaluate all factors.

If the adolescents scored from 0 to 3 points, they have a basic level of advertising literacy, from 4 to 6 points they have a medium level and from 7 to 8 the respondents have an advanced level of advertising literacy. For greater clarity, the levels are illustrated in the chart below.

Basic level of media literacy	0 – 3 points
Medium level of media literacy	4 – 6 points
Advanced level of media literacy	7 – 8 points

TABLE 1: Level of advertising literacy

Source: author's own processing, 2022

3 Results and Discussion

We examined if the respondents read tags under photograph/video posts on social networks. Available were the following possible answers: Yes (3), Mostly yes (2), Mostly no (1), No (0). As advertising always has to be tagged, the advertising notice on the social network Instagram is usually in the description of the photo/video. Respondents were asked to express their attitude towards descriptions of pictures/videos on social networks. The most common answer was *yes* (38.8%) which represents people who read the description of posts on social media. Other 35.1% of respondents usually read the descriptions (option *mostly yes*). 19.3% usually do not read the descriptions (*mostly no*) and 6.9% do not read them at all (*No*). The 17 year old age group are those respondents who prefer to read the description, followed by 14 year olds, then 15 year

olds, 16 years and finally 13 year old adolescents who tend not to read the post description texts. Many previous studies had shown that increasing age is a factor having an impact on an increasing level of advertising literacy, however, in our case, interest in knowing information (and as such increasing one's level of advertising literacy) does not increase with higher age.

One sign of advertising literacy is the ability to comprehend commercials in the right way. By means of the following advertising picture, we tried to find if the respondents comprehended the advertiser's message in the right way. The list of possible answers to/ meanings of the advertisement was as follows: The picture's intent is (0) to motivate ecological thinking, (1) to suggest that an ecological lifestyle is expensive, (2) to motivate the purchase of glass food containers.



PICTURE 1: Sponsored meme post

Source: EMEFKA sponsored post. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CZHomarMgkx/>>.

Keeping in mind that the post is tagged as sponsoring, with the text: “Sponsored by @klarsteinslovensko“, the right answer for the question was 2) to motivate to purchase glass food containers as the company Klarstein sells these. This is a good example of native advertising in which the advertiser's intent is difficult to be comprehended and these commercials influence consumers on a subconscious level. Advertising literacy examines not only if we can correctly identify advertising but also whether we are able to comprehend it in the right way. The message of the above mentioned image commercial was understood correctly only by 29% of respondents. The majority, 53.7% of respondents ticked the option (0) to motivate ecological thinking. The remaining 17.2% ticked option (1) to suggest that an ecological lifestyle is expensive. Taking into account the age of respondents, the most successful age group were adolescents aged 13, subsequently those aged 17, 14 and 15. The least successful were 16 year old respondents. This result proved that age is not a factor having an influence on the level of a person's advertising literacy.

In our research, we also used a picture that implies its commercial purpose, though, in fact, it is not a commercial. Respondents were once again asked to identify the advertiser's intent. The following answers/ meanings were suggested: (0) to entertain, (1) to increase the viewership of games of the Slovak hockey team during the Winter Olympic Games, (2) to bring attention to the main advertising sponsor of the Winter Olympic Games.



PICTURE 2: *Non-sponsored meme post*

Source: EMEFKA sponsored post. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CaHCA_Rs4ca/>.

In this case, the respondents were successful as 71% ticked option (0) *to entertain*. Option 1) *to increase the viewership of games of the Slovak hockey team during the Winter Olympic Games* was ticked by 6% of respondents and the other 23% ticked option (2) *to bring attention to the main advertising sponsor of the Winter Olympic Games*. Referring to the respondents' age, the most successful age group were the 15 year old respondents, then 14 year olds and subsequently 16, 17 and 13 year old respondents. Summarizing the most common answers in both cases of image commercials we found that adolescents do not expect posts on social media to be of advertising character. They primarily count on their value as images for entertainment. This is a well-known fact and the advertisers rely on it and they more and more often use native advertising in the form of memes to address young people on the Internet. This is also a primary reason why we consider continuously increasing the level of advertising literacy to be just as important as increasing the level of media, financial, digital or any other literacy.

Nowadays, the most popular format of Instagram is Reels, supported by algorithms, too, and for this reason we examined if respondents could differentiate if the Reels are commercial (sponsored) one or not. The respondents might have chosen from the following answers: Yes (1), No (0), I do not know (0). The respondents watched a minute long video which simulated the regular Reels section video queue. The video consisted of multiple Instagram videos – the first depicted cats in funny situations, the second showed 5 places in Europe worth visiting and the third was a commercial. In fact, the last video was a commercial promoting the game Beatstar. The post was tagged as “Sponsored” and in the lower part of the video there was a link prompting the viewer to download the game. Subsequently, the last / fourth video was an entertaining one about a new music trend. 70.4% (245) respondents recognised the commercial in between other Reels. 10.1% of respondents did not realise that there was a commercial Reel and 19.5% rather choose the option “I do not know”. The additional question related to unveiling the commercial video was “Which product was promoted in the Reels?” was responded to by 245 respondents and their answer was mostly correct. The respondents' answers varied from “a game, a mobile phone game, Beatstar to a game about rhythm”. 7 respondents, though, incorrectly believed that the commercial Reels was promoting European countries and other 5 respondents named both, Beatstar video and the one about European countries.

In order to verify the advertising literacy of adolescents, we chose a more complicated Reels available on Instagram. Similar to the previous question, the following answers were possible: Yes (1), No (0), I do not know (0).

The video named "Teachers' talks" was a funny video showing situations at school such as writing a test, undergoing an oral exam or a talk on how to choose a university. In the end of the video spot, Pan-European University in Bratislava and benefits that they provide to their students were mentioned. The video was tagged as 'commercial'. Compared to other Reels, in this case, the respondents mostly did not realise that it was a commercial spot which created a paradox. 67% of respondents did not even realise there was a commercial included, 15.8% did not know and only 17.2% of respondents were correct and identified the advertisement. The additional question related to the video: "What was the product promoted in the video?" showed that 21 respondents did not know and 38 respondents identified correctly that the video was a promotion for a university, in fact for Pan-European University. One respondent answered that it simply was an "education related advertisement" and the answer could not have been evaluated as correct as the spot was not created in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and it did not promote 'education' in general, rather only one university.

Instagram Stories is the last form of advertisement the respondents see in the online environment. We decided to add to our research a video that showed Instagram Stories and the respondents were asked to identify what was the main idea behind its creation. The following answers were offered: To entertain (0), To motivate to e-sport(0), To motivate to 'usual' sport (0), To motivate to play games (0), To invite the followers to the gamers' festival Unicup (1).

The Stories we chose promoted gamers' festival Unicup. The video shows two girls, one of them is playing a game on her laptop. She says to the other girl that she does sport on the computer, and she is training for Unicup. The Stories promoted Unicup, a gamers' festival that takes place every year in Trnava. 26.4% of respondents were successful and answered correctly that the main idea of the video was to invite the followers to Unicup. 30.5% of respondents marked that the video wanted to entertain the viewers, 32.2% marked the answer 'To motivate to e-sport', 8% marked 'To motivate to 'usual' sport and the remaining 2.9% thought the video wanted to motivate viewers to practice games. From the sample of 348 respondents, 92 adolescents were successful.

Once again, in the same way as in the case of the previous videos, this Instagram Reels confirmed that young people expect social networks to entertain them and they do not realise how much the native advertising there is focused on them and how such commercials influence their buying behaviour.

Final Level of Advertising Literacy

The following chart was created to gather average levels (in points) for each separately asked question in relation to the age of respondents. The last column shows the overall average level of advertising literacy for each separate age group (separate points are added up and then averaged). Here is an example of the interpretation of results to ensure the chart is comprehended correctly: 13 year old respondents scored on average 1.93 points on the first question, 0.35 points on the second question, 0.6 on the third question, etc. The overall level of advertising literacy of 13 year old adolescents reached a medium level (according to this classification: 0-3= basic level, 4-6= medium level, 7-8 advanced level) as the overall average of all questions scorings and their subsequent division reached 3.85 points. The final number 3.85 was a result of averaging all points from all the respondents' answers.

Age	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	Level of advertising literacy
13 yo	1.93	0.35	0.60	0.70	0.06	0.18	3.85 – medium level
14 yo	2.16	0.32	0.76	0.72	0.16	0.27	4.40 – medium level
15 yo	2.10	0.25	0.77	0.84	0.17	0.24	4.40 – medium level
16 yo	1.95	0.25	0.70	0.64	0.16	0.33	4.05 – medium level
17 yo	2.21	0.33	0.61	0.52	0.33	0.19	4.21 – medium level
Overall level of advertising literacy of adolescents							4.18 – medium level

TABLE 2: Final level of advertising literacy

Source: author's own processing, 2022

Averaging all points from all age groups of respondents showed that adolescents, in general, scored 4.18 points which means they reached a medium level of advertising literacy. This means that adolescents have certain competencies specific to advertising. They were nearly always able to identify the commercial and comprehend its message. More complex formats, such as native advertisements, were more troublesome to be identified. This was proven in our research with the video promoting Pan-European University. The fact is that social networks, where adolescents spend most of their time, are clogged with advertisements of native character which means that adolescents are always in the flow of commercials, even though they do not always realise it. This is also the reason why advertisers are more and more often using native marketing for promotion, e.g. by means of influencers and Instagram formats such as Stories, trendy memes or Reels which were examined in our research. As previously mentioned, new formats popular on the Internet, such as vlogs, had already been examined by Dutch academics. Their results corresponded with our results and show that young adolescents have a certain level of advertising literacy. The level and the way it was evaluated are different from the Dutch research and as such we cannot clearly state the level of advertising literacy of the studied group. Even though some researchers³⁹ tried to calculate the level of advertising literacy, most academics do not perform a rigid calculation. Here we see a challenge to unify the calculation and create a simple system of calculation of advertising literacy which could be used by all researchers and would unify the results of all research in the field of advertising literacy.

Continuous changes on social networks such as Facebook and TikTok and new format introduction made us propose the need of further investigation in the field. As yet uninvestigated and newly born formats prompt the advertisers to more creative content creation and easier ways to influence users of social networks that, after all, reflects the level of advertising literacy not only of adolescents but also generally of all social network users of various age groups.

Even though the identification and comprehension of advertisements by adolescents is not always at a high level (it only reaches medium level), the adolescents realise when there is an advertisement (proven by Dutch academics' researching advertising literacy on vlogs). Not only did we gather information on the topic from other research but we also added information from our own research. Our research has shown that adolescents are interested in information, they read texts of posts on social networks which also proves that their level of advertising literacy can be increased.

As shown in the chart above, there is no relation between increasing levels of advertising literacy and the increasing age of respondents which, however, is not consistent with the results of other foreign researchers; unlike De Jans, Hudders and Cauberghe who found in their research that the level of advertising literacy increases with the increasing age of respondents. They also pointed out that resistance towards advertising increases with age. We acknowledged that this might be the limit of our research as we did not further investigate affective advertising literacy as one part of advertising literacy. Adolescents aged 16 years achieved fewer points than adolescents aged 14, 15 or 17 years. Overall, 16 year old respondents have low levels

³⁹ Note of the authors: Such as Eva A. van Reijmersdal et al., Mira Lee and Ronald J. Faber.

of advertising literacy, even though they represented the most numerous age group in our research (31.9%). The least successful were 13 year old respondents. While comparing 13 year old respondents with 17 year olds, we perceive a significant increase in level of advertising literacy which may mean that age might have an influence on advertising literacy. To be able to proclaim so, we suggest executing research on respondents of more varied age groups.

As our research has shown, advertising literacy is not a well-discussed topic among Slovak academics which means that there is a wide range of directions for further research. Examination of advertising literacy of adolescents or other age groups is, though, not enough. There is a way to increase advertising literacy and educate youngsters (as well as older people) and that is by means of change in the education curriculum. Education in this field would lead to an increase in the overall literacy of Slovak consumers.

4 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine advertising literacy of adolescents, specifically on social networks. To comprehend the topic well enough, first of all, we gathered information from home and foreign literature related to advertising literacy. We studied opinions of foreign and local authors and the results of their research related to respondents' ability to identify and comprehend advertisements. The main part of our study was our research executed on 348 respondents aged from 13 to 17 years old. The research dealt with the social network Instagram and published commercial content that the respondents commonly see on Instagram.

We decided to study advertising literacy in relation to social networks posts as young people spend most of their time on social networks and advertisers use social networks for self-promotion now more than ever, as they may easily mask their commercial intents there. Our research was a continuation of the work of Dutch researchers who had studied advertising literacy in relation to vlogs. At the same time, we continue the work of Vrabec, who is one of the few Slovak academics dealing with advertising literacy in offline environments.

The research results show that the chosen age group of adolescents has at their disposal medium levels of advertising literacy which means that they can identify a commercial, but not always. The research has also shown that adolescents are interested in information and they want to be well-oriented in posts or commercials on the Internet.

Unlike other researchers, we realised that research into the advertising literacy of the population should be effected on individuals of bigger age groups. The difference in advertising literacy of 13 year old adolescents compared to their 14 year old counterparts was not significant at all. In the case of the comparison of 13 year old respondents with their 17 year old counterparts, there was an immense increase in advertising literacy.

Advertising literacy is a considerably wide topic and it requires more detailed research, especially as in the Slovak academic background not much attention has been paid to such research. There are many spheres where further research of online environments would be a good idea, such as articles published in popular online lifestyle magazines targeted at adolescents. Last, but not least, the outcome of such research should be the correct interpretation of research outcomes and to suggest solutions to improve advertising literacy of adolescents, but not only them; children and seniors should not be excluded.

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