



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Economics

Children, parents and ads

- The role of advertising agencies

Sirpa Susanna Blomqvist

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Supervisor: Johan Gaddefors, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Economics

Examiner: Karin Hakelius, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Economics

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Abstract

Advertising that targets children is not a new phenomenon as they have an important impact on the buying decisions their parents make. The aim of this study is to investigate the process of making and planning advertising for families, children and parents, and the role of the advertising agencies. The investigated fields were how advertisers target children and who decides the target for advertising. The research focused on two main questions: how the target of advertising is determined and how advertisers see children as a target group.

The empirical study was implemented by using the qualitative method of theme interviews. The research data was gathered in Helsinki, Finland, from eight art directors in advertising agencies. According to the advertising agencies, they have to help their client to specify their target and message. Most of the advertising agencies have been helping their clients to clarify the segment and also to find new markets. They have also been trying to find new markets for children. In the literature, children are seen as victims of ads, and for advertisers, children are a very challenging target group. Advertisers also feel that children are used to see ads everywhere and that makes them a more challenging target.

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	PROBLEM BACKGROUND	1
1.2	PROBLEM	2
1.3	AIM AND DELIMITATIONS	3
2	A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	4
2.1	CHILDREN AND PARENTS AS TARGET AUDIENCE	4
2.1.1	<i>Preference zone</i>	5
2.1.2	<i>Pester zone</i>	6
2.1.3	<i>Purchase zone</i>	7
2.2	HOW ADVERTISING WORKS IN THE RECEIVERS MIND.....	8
2.3	DETERMINING THE INFLUENCER	9
2.3.1	<i>Parents as influencers</i>	9
2.3.2	<i>Ads and peers as influencers</i>	10
2.4	THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS	11
3	METHOD	12
3.1	THE CHOSEN METHOD	12
3.1.1	<i>Theme interviews</i>	12
3.1.2	<i>Collecting material</i>	13
3.1.3	<i>Amount of interviews</i>	13
3.1.4	<i>Reliability of interviews</i>	13
4	EMPIRICAL FIELD	15
4.1	HISTORY OF ADVERTISING	15
4.2	THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING AGENCIES	15
4.3	ADVERTISING CHANNELS	16
4.3.1	<i>Traditional ads in television commercial breaks</i>	16
4.3.2	<i>Product placement in television programs and in movies</i>	16
4.3.3	<i>Advertising to children in the internet</i>	16
4.4	INTERVIEWS.....	17
4.4.1	<i>Art Director E</i>	18
4.4.2	<i>Art Director H</i>	19
4.4.3	<i>Art Director J</i>	19
4.4.4	<i>Art Director K</i>	21
4.4.5	<i>Art Director M</i>	22
4.4.6	<i>Art Director P</i>	23
4.4.7	<i>Art Director To</i>	24
4.4.8	<i>Art Director Te</i>	25
5.1	CHILDREN AND PARENTS AS A TARGET AUDIENCE	27
5.2	HOW THE TARGET OF ADVERTISING IS DETERMINED AND BY WHO?	29
5.3	CHILDREN AS SEGMENT	30
6	CONCLUSION.....	34
6.1	HOW TARGET IS DETERMINED AND BY WHO	34
6.2	CHILDREN AS SEGMENT	34
6.3	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	35
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	36
	<i>Literature and publications</i>	36
	<i>Internet</i>	38
	APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	39

1 Introduction

Advertising that is targeted to children is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1960's, children were adopted as their own consumer group (Heinonen, 2005). This chapter presents problems regarding advertising to children and the aim of this study.

1.1 Problem background

Financially, children have a huge impact in the buying decisions their parents make. Children have and use their own money, and at the same time their parents are spending money on them. In the USA in 2000, children under 12-years old were spending 28 billion dollars in purchases of their products and services by using their own money, and during the same year, their parents were buying them goods cumulatively worth 250 billion dollars (Gunter *et al.*, 2005). Children can influence their parents' buying decisions and they also make smaller buying decisions for themselves. For example, in 2006 in Finland, children aged from 6 to 17-years old were given over 300 million euro as a weekly allowance (www.nordea, 1, 2012). Smaller family sizes enable parents to use more money per child (Koivusalo-Kuusivaara, 2007). They can be seen as final decision-makers, as equal negotiators or just by existing they can influence their parents' buying decisions (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

Children face thousands of ads in their everyday lives. Parents are not able to control or restrict the time their children are exposed to media, television and computers. As the time children are spending with media increases, the amount of ads children receive everyday also increases. In Finland, children usually have their own television and computer in their room (Koivusalo-Kuusivaara, 2007). Also, 82% of 6-17-year old children in Finland have their own mobile phone (www.nordea, 1, 2012).

The higher amount of working mothers has increased the time children spend with media (Koivusalo-Kuusivaara, 2007). Single parents who cannot spend that much time with their children (Mittal *et al.*, 2012), and parents who are building their careers at the same time as they raise their children, might increase the time children use media (Koivusalo-Kuusivaara, 2007). The fact that mothers are working more has also turned some purchasing decisions

from moms to children, such as, for example, small investments such as food (Mittal *et al.*, 2010).

1.2 Problem

At a time when children are facing more ads than ever before, their parents' control of media use has substantially decreased. Children can be talented in manipulating or blaming their parents for the time they cannot spend with their children, and sometimes, parents might feel guilty for that reason (Mittal *et al.*, 2010). Parents might try to make up for that by buying material things for their children (Koivusalo-Kuusivaara, 2007). The biggest claim against advertising is the fact that children do not have full understanding when it comes to ads. A child under 8-years old cannot even separate an ad from entertainment in general (Kelly *et al.*, 2010).

Advertising can create conflicts for the relationship between child and parent (Mittal *et al.*, 2010). It can also make children want products that they would not actually need; advertising can create needs for them (Gunter *et al.*, 2005, p.4), which might make children unhappy or dissatisfied when they cannot get those things they think they need. This can lead to children suffering from low self-esteem (Mittal *et al.*, 2010). Children with low self-esteem are the ones that react the most to ads (Gunter *et al.*, 2005, p.132-135). Additionally, holiday seasons are purely commercialized and may lead to materialism in a child's early age (Gunter *et al.*, 2005, p. 4; Heinonen & Kontinen, 2001, p. 91).

The advertising of "junk food" (foods that contains a lot of sugar, salt and fat) to children is also an issue. Using toys or cartoons in advertising make it even more favourable to children (Aysen & Vitell 2009; Cross 2001, p. 6-7). Aggressive advertising of junk food has increased children snacking habits (Cross 2001, p. 7-8) and that increases the risk of obesity and other health-related problems.

The literature on this topic is usually focused on the negative effects when it comes to advertising to children. This study will investigate the process and roles of advertising agencies and their clients, which give tasks to those agencies. In this area there is not much literature either, so the results of this study can contribute new information to this area of research.

1.3 Aim and delimitations

The aim of this study is to investigate the process of creating and planning advertising that targets children and parents that takes place inside the advertising agencies. I will investigate how advertisers target children, who decides the target for advertising and how the process of advertising to children is planned from the beginning. When advertisers are planning their marketing communication they choose a target audience, determine the segmentation of that audience, and how to reach that audience. The research focuses on two main questions when it comes to advertising to children:

- How is the target audience of advertising determined and by whom: advertising agencies or their clients?
- How do the advertisers see children: as a segment or as a target audience of advertising?

The main delimitation of the study is the fact that all the empirical data were collected from advertising agencies in Finland, Helsinki. The interviews were made with art directors in advertising agencies. The study does not take a stand the other participants' opinions of the process; the client who order advertisement. The collected data is based on art directors' professional experience, opinions and personal feelings about the investigated topic.

2 A theoretical perspective

This chapter will present different theories when it comes to targeting and advertising to children and parents and determining the target audience. At first, it is necessary to determine who is actually making the buying decision that should be the target of advertisement.

2.1 Children and parents as target audience

Parents can be seen as the ones who are influencing their children's buying behavior and understand advertising. However children can also influence their parents. When it comes to children, you can find three market opportunities: first, they have their own money and they make their own purchasing decisions; second, they can be seen as future customers; and third, they are big influencers when it comes to decision making of the whole family (Valkenburga & Cantor, 2001).

Regarding children as influencer of the buying decisions in the family, the influence in the buying process and decision making varies. Usually in Western families their opinions are taken into account when making purchasing decisions (Valkenburga & Cantor, 2001). Children can be seen as the influencer to their parents' buying decisions, and also as influencers to "household purchases that were not for their own use" (Caruana & Vassallo, 2003, p.55). Children can even influence the way their parents clothe themselves (*Ibid.*). Children can also be a remarkable information source when it comes to "brand-related household decisions" (Dotson & Hyatt, p.222).

Children's interest level and influence level in different product categories depend on their age. In their article, *Marketing to Children: A Planning Framework*, Sharma and Dasgupta (2009) divide the buying decision making into three different groups. First is the *preference zone*; the advantage of children is taken into account in the decision process and children are indirect affecters or influencers. Advertising is targeted to parents, but children play a big role in it (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009, p.181). The second zone is the *pester zone*; it refers to the fact that children are a crucial influencer in the decision making process. The age of a child determines which group children are in (*Ibid.* p.182). The third zone is called *purchase zone*; where advertising is targeted directly to children. Products in this category are purchased by

children themselves and the buying decision is made by them alone or co-operatively with parents (*Ibid.* p. 183).

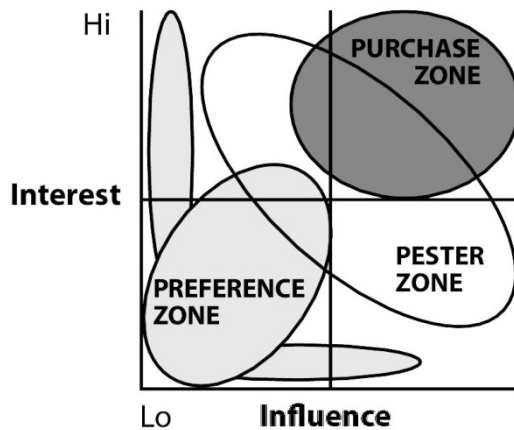


Fig. 1 Purchase, preference and pester zone –category divides the interest level of children and the influence power toward purchase (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009, p. 182).

Children’s influential power and the level of their interest in products vary through product categories. When marketers know what category they represent, targeting the right segment is easier and more effective. By categorizing the decision makers advertising can be targeted to the right people, the ones that are actually making the buying decision (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). The next sections will analyze the different zones from the figure above more carefully.

2.1.1 Preference zone

The first approach, *the preference zone*, includes products where the end-user might actually be the parents, or the whole family, but the parents are making the final decision. That is the reason why advertising is targeted to parents, but children still play a role in the process.

The child’s best interests and also their whole existence are highlighted in the advertising. In this category, children can be seen as indirect influencers since they might not have any interest in the product. For example, when purchasing a car parents might buy a safer option or, for example, a child seat, even though a child does not have any preference towards those products (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

In this category, children do not have much to say about the decision and they are not the end-users by themselves, but they still influence the decision. It is also in the interest of the

advertiser to make children brand loyal consumers when they are young so that they might become future customers (Geraci, 2004; Valkenburga & Cantor, 2001). Advertisers want to reach children while they are still young and before they “reach an age where they make or influence purchase decisions” (*Ibid.* p.3).

Products like cars and bigger investments that parents use, belong to this category. To increase the knowledge about and to savor the experience of a brand or product is a key point in the products that belongs to this category (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). The most common marketing strategy is to rely on being a good parent, buying healthy and safe products for their children and such (*Ibid.*).

Healthy products for children are also in this category. The product might not be so interesting for the children themselves but parents would like to increase the consumption of these products among their children. In the marketing information, parents are looking for healthy facts whereas usually a mascot or cartoon is added to catch children’s attention (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009; Geraci, 2004).

2.1.2 Pester zone

The second approach, *the pester zone*, involves products where the final buying decision is made by the parents but children have a strong influence. Children influence their parents by nagging, pestering and so forth. Naturally, the influential power of a child increases as the child grows older. In this matter, words, such as “I am the only kid who doesn’t have one of these” or “If you loved me you’d . . .,” are often used by children to get products from their parents (Gaurner & Arnore, 2010, p.3).

Depending on the age of the child, the strategy to market to them varies. For example, if the child already has a strong influence on the decision making process but does not have specific interest in the product category, marketers try to increase their interest. Then marketers could take advantage of the strong influence power that children already have in the decision making process (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). The goal of advertisers is to be the one that children pick from all the different options they are offered. On the other hand, if the child has a low influence but a strong interest, marketers should try to be even more favorable in the child’s mind so that they would want the product even more. This way their influential power

could potentially increase. In both of these cases, it is favorable to create a positive image toward parents so that they would preferably buy the products for their children (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

Products that usually are in preference or in the purchase zone can fall into this category as well. The distinct characteristics between the three categories are the age of the children in which categorizing can be based (Gaumer & Arnone, 2009). As children grow older, their influential power increases, and they are seen more as negotiators or the final decision makers in the buying process (*Ibid.*).

2.1.3 Purchase zone

The third category, *the purchase zone*, represents products in which the buying decision is made primarily by children, in cooperation with parents. Children grow from daughters and sons to consumers (Gaumer & Arnone, 2009). Parents might actually be the purchaser but the child influences the final buying decision up to a great degree. For example, all presents or gifts are in this category. Even though a child makes a wish list, the parents are the ones who actually buy the products (*Ibid.*). This also includes free time activities such as movies, restaurants and holiday decisions. Parents determine the budget and usually children have a strong influence, so both of them are taken into account in the advertising. Even though the parents determine the budget, children have a strong influence in how that money is spent which is why both of them are taken into account in advertising.

Smaller investments that children can make themselves are in this category; for example, small snacks, candy, fast food and so forth (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). These kinds of products and services are the ones that are targeted directly to children (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009; Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). Products in the purchase zone are the products that children buy on their own or clearly ask from their parents.

Toys and products that are targeted directly to children are in this category if the negotiating power of the child is high. On the other hand, if children's negotiating power is low in the product category, it is better to rely on pester power. To sum up, products that children are consuming and products that they have a strong influence and strong interest in are the most common products that are advertised directly to children (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

2.2 How advertising works in the receivers mind

In theory, what happens in the receiver's mind when a consumer perceives an ad? In the literature of this field, one can find different approaches to the process in the receiver's mind. This study will focus on the AIDA-model which is made up of four stages of communication results: awareness, comprehension, conviction, and action (Glowa, 2002). Critics point out that the AIDA-model steps do not always follow the assigned order, nor do people follow the assigned order of steps. People might just go to a shop and buy something without having seen an advertisement prior to that purchase, or it might be that consumers start to desire a product and then search for information (*Ibid.*). The reason why the AIDA-model is chosen is that other theories are based on that model.

The AIDA-model refers to making customers aware of the product in general and it leads to action: a buying decision. In the first stage the awareness of the product is increased. The second stage is to make the potential customers interested in the product and make them start to search for information about the product. That should lead to the third stage: make the audience desire the product. The fourth stage, activity, will follow after the desire. When it comes to advertising to children, the same model is used with words "learn, feel, think, and want" (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000, p.219).



Fig. 2 Four stages of the AIDA -model (Glowa, 2002, p. 182).

Figure 2 above demonstrates what happens, for example, when a child receives a message or an advertisement. Before every stage there are factors that interrupt the process and prevent the next stage to be reached.

In the first stage, *awareness*, there are barriers such as how to make the target aware of the product. If there is too much marketing communication, people will not respond or react to all ads. The problem today is the quantity of ads people come in contact with every day. Building awareness is not an easy task. Selecting the right communication channel and targeting the right segment is a crucial element in the advertising process (Glowa, 2002).

The first barrier before the second stage, *interest*, is the fact that even though advertisers may catch their target audience's awareness regarding the product, it may not be interesting to them. Ads should awaken the interest of a product in the target audience so that they will inquire for more information about the product. This second stage should lead to the third stage, *desire*, which means that eventually interest will lead to the desire of the product (Glowa, 2002). The barriers between interest and desire are whether or not the ads are powerful enough to make the target audience desire the product.

The last stage, *action*, focuses on the barriers between desire and purchase. What is needed to make the target audience act and buy a product? Barriers in the last stage might be lack of money, especially when it comes to children and bigger investments. The main point that connects the last two stages is to make the audience desire the product so much that they will end up in action: purchasing and buying (Glowa, 2002).

2.3 Determining the influencer

Targeting the one who has the strongest influence in the buying decision is obviously the right thing to do. Nowadays, parents are listening to their children's opinions when making purchasing decisions or, at least, they are influenced by their children in some other way. Each industry has a different approach when it comes to directly advertising to children or advertising products that are used by children but targeted to parents. The approach used is determined by the way the purchasing decision is usually made in families (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). The decision making process varies between families, the age of children, the influential power of children and, also, the advertised product category.

2.3.1 Parents as influencers

Parents can be seen as having the strongest influence when their children are becoming consumers: "Parents know more than their children do about product offerings, and act as teachers in an agent - learner relationship with their children" (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000, p. 220). Parents affect their children as to which kind of consumers they grow up to be (Caruana & Vassallo, 2003).

Parents are directly or indirectly affecting their children's behavior as consumers. They can also educate their children when it comes to ads that are targeted directly to children (Gaumer & Arnone, 2009). Parents are the ones who have the authority to restrict their children's media usage, thus, parents can supervise their children's advertising exposure (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). Parents can teach their children to have "more knowledge about consumer-related matters" (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005, p.155), and they can also raise their children to be "able to see through selling techniques in advertising" (*Ibid*, p.155). Nowadays, when a lot of advertising is focused on children, parents can only try to educate their children regarding the lure of advertising (Gaumer & Arnone, 2009, p.2).

2.3.2 Ads and peers as influencers

Even though parents can be seen as the main influencers as their children become consumers, children can also be seen as strong influencers on the buying decisions of their parents. When it comes to children, there are two alternative marketing approaches. The more traditional approach is based on the AIDA-model where the ad is the focus, whereas the other approach focuses on peers.

The more traditional approach sees ads as the main influencer and other stages follow almost in the same order as in the AIDA-model. After seeing an ad, the child wants to have the product and that leads to child-parent conflict which could lead to the purchase by the parent. The figure 3 below describes this model, when ads are seen as the main influencer.



Fig. 3 Approach with ads as main influencer (Furnham, 2002, p.129).

This theory basically means that after seeing an ad, children will want the product, demand it from their parents, and thus conflicts will arise. According to the model, following the conflict, the parents will purchase the product for the child (Furnham, 2002, p. 129). It assumes that ads have a huge impact on children. It does not take into account the influence of peers and it assumes that all the ads have the same kind of impact on children. However, not all ads are equal in quality, as well as a purchase will not always result because of conflict (Furnham, 2002, p. 129).



Fig. 4 Approach with peers as main influencer (Furnham, 2002, p.130).

The other approach, in Figure 4, claims that peers are the main influencer on each other and ads are only making the effect stronger. Children influence each other by making one another want the same products as their friends (Furnham, 2002, p.130). Since children already have particular wishes, they start to search for ads that respond to their desires (*Ibid.*). This means that even though ads intend to create new demands and needs, they end up being unsuccessful since wishes are already in the child's mind and they select the commercials they want to see. After selecting commercials, children can make a request to their parents about the product, and the parents decide whether to buy it or not.

2.4 Theoretical synthesis

It seems that parents and children can be the main target when it comes to families. Children can influence each other (Furnham, 2002). Ads can be seen as the main influencer, or children can seek ads that already match their interests (*Ibid.*). Parents and their buying habits shape their children as consumers. Parents can be the main influencer (Caruana & Vassallo, 2003), or at least the ones who have the money to buy products. Children can have a direct or indirect impact on their parents buying decisions (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

The field the advertising agencies meet is very complex and interactive. It is constantly changing, so it is a great challenge for advertisers so keep up with all of the changes. Choosing the right target audience is not an easy task for advertisers as they need detailed information on how the decision is made in the product category as well as who has the most decision making power.

3 Method

The method chapter introduces the research method for the empirical study. The empirical part of the research will focus on the role of advertising agencies when it comes to advertising to children and targeting the whole family.

3.1 The chosen method

The method used depends on the nature of the research problem. Qualitative method is used when a study tries to describe, understand and interpret the reality and related practices and meanings (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, p.13). By conducting interviews, deep knowledge and understanding can be developed. This study tries to explain the situation when it comes to advertising to children and parents which is the reason why this qualitative method works best and is used in this study.

3.1.1 Theme interviews

In a theme interview, also known as a half-structured interview, themes are defined beforehand (Koskinen *et al.*, 2005, p. 105). The interviewer needs to make sure that all the decided themes will be processed during the interview. The interview does not include ready-made questions, but the themes of the interviews are the same, and the scope and order varies (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, p.87). Qualitative research method will be the best method because the study tries to understand the role of advertising agencies in the content making process when it comes to ads. By quantitative methods, gathering the same kind of understanding would not be possible. Also, an advantage in theme interviews is the possibility to clarify some questions, if necessary (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, p.88).

The questions will be open-ended and the interviewee can also bring up some questions. The ready-made structure of the themes will guarantee that all of the themes will be discussed in the interview. The advantage of half-structured interviews is the fact that the interviewee can guide the interview without totally controlling it (Koskinen *et al.*, 2005, p. 105). The plan of theme interviews should be based on the aim of the study, and beforehand, the decided themes should not be too controlled. There should also be some time left for free discussion (*Ibid.*).

3.1.2 Collecting material

In qualitative research, interviews are chosen by selecting the right kind of people, who have good knowledge and experience in the field of study (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, p.62). In this research interviewees are working in advertising agencies as art directors, basically doing the same sort of work: designing advertisements.

The reason why I chose advertising agencies to be the unit of study was that even though clients determine the content of ads, advertising agencies can still be seen as the last filter before ads are published and received by the public. All the interviews were recorded with their permission, since it guarantees that all the information will be captured (*Ibid.* p.90).

3.1.3 Amount of interviews

Eight interviews were conducted between 30 March and 09 April 2012. This amount was enough since the last interviews did not offer more relevant information about the subject. When no new information is appearing in the interviews, the material has become saturated. After the seventh interview, no new information was captured. That is a good sign of the saturation of the material (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, p.63). I got a few good connections to advertising agencies from a family friend, and by doing interviews I got more and more connections. That was the main reason why I was able to have so many interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted in advertising agencies and some of them in cafeterias.

3.1.4 Reliability of interviews

One of the strengths of making interview is the flexibility of the method (Vuorela, 2005, p.37). Through interviews qualitative information can be collected (*Ibid.*). The challenge is the formulation of the questions. The interviewee should have an opportunity to answer to the questions without the interviewer loading him or her.

The whole interviewing situation might be a tricky thing. The interviewer should try to make a normal atmosphere, and that might be challenging, especially for an interviewer who does not have so much experience (Vuorela, 2005, p.41). The interviewer should be as neutral as possible, without bringing their own opinions in to the discussion. By conducting interviews I improved my interviewing skills. I found that giving more space for interviewees to speak and

being strict with the topic was the best way to get material. The experience which was gathered during interviews made the conducted information deeper and better.

The interpretation of the results is also up to the interviewee, but obviously the interviewer plays a role in the whole research (Vuorela, 2005, p.39). There is also a risk when it comes to the interviewee, since they might try to answer “right answers” instead of answering how they actually feel (*Ibid.* p.43). To sum up, as a research method interviews require a lot of work and also contain a few risks regarding the quantity of interviews, the chosen method, the interviewer’s experience and the content of the interview (*Ibid.* p.51).

4 Empirical field

The following chapter will give a brief introduction to the history of advertising and the role of advertising agencies in the advertising process. The chapter will also introduce advertising channels used in Finland.

4.1 History of advertising

Before the 18th century, the purpose of advertising was only to give product information to consumers. Advertising was to communicate about the price of the product. There were not a lot of producers in any industries, so there was not any remarkable competition between companies. Products were purchased for a need and there was not so much to choose from. After the middle of 18th century the competition started to grow and it started to be necessary to actually sell the product: that led to advertising to consumers (Malmelin, 2003).

The segmentation started soon after the first television commercials were shown. Marketers began being interested in consumer needs and wants and to respond to those needs and wants. It is also said that half of marketing investments are unnecessary but, because it is impossible to show which ones are unnecessary, companies cannot stop advertising (Tikkanen *et al.*, 2007). Advertising agencies help their clients to solve these problems so that companies themselves can focus on their main business field.

4.2 The role of advertising agencies

In the middle of the 19th century advertising became as it is today. Advertising agencies started to sell their know-how and the expression of ads changed to be more visual and attractive (Malmelin, 2003). Advertising agencies help their clients achieve their goals through advertising. Selecting the right agency to take care of advertising is one of the most significant choices companies have to make when it comes to promoting (*Ibid.*).

Advertising agencies have experience when it comes to determining the right target, reaching the audience and selecting the communication channel. They support their clients to grow their sales by effective advertising (www.mtl, 1, 2012).

4.3 Advertising channels

Many channels are used for communication, advertising is not focusing just on television and magazines, today there are more channels and sometimes ads can interact with the target. Also the internet offers an easy channel to reach children. The publicity in general in media is good, because brand will reach targets, or in this case, children's deeper mind (Nairn, 2008), and will be bought more often (Chester & Montgomery, 2008).

4.3.1 Traditional ads in television commercial breaks

Tv-channels have commercial breaks during programs and children see these commercials every day. Children demand products that are advertised in television, especially the ones with ads they like (Mittal *et al.*, 2010). One television hour contains 10 ads (Gunter *et al.*, 2005, p.2). An average child spends 2.48 hours watching television per day and in the weekends it is even more; 3.47 hours (Mittal *et al.*, 2010).

4.3.2 Product placement in television programs and in movies

Product placement and the productization of movie characters is a method often used in advertising to children when it comes to movies. Productization is an effective way to sell to children by using movie characters (Gunter *et al.*, 2005). It is hard for children to separate ads from the entertainment in general, especially when it comes to product placement (Hudson *et al.*, 2007). It makes it difficult to separate entertainment from ads and also complicates the parent's ability to supervise how much their children are exposed to ads (*Ibid.*).

4.3.3 Advertising to children in the internet

Children spend a lot of time on the internet; 70% of children between 8-11-years have access to the internet in their home (Chester & Montgomery, 2008). By using the right kind of segmentation advertisers can target their audience on the internet in effective ways and tailor advertising personally (*Ibid.*). On the internet children may not separate what is entertainment and what is advertising, especially when it is matter of games since those are free. However, these free games, advergimes, are commercial pages that sell advertising space to advertisers and also information of the users of the internet page (*Ibid.*).

4.4 Interviews

Interviews were made with eight people who have been working in advertising agencies as Art Directors or in a kind of position where they are designing ads. All of them have experience from Helsinki, Finland, and some of them from all over the world. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were made by theme method, which means that all the same themes are discussed with interviewees, but the content might vary a bit. Discussed themes were the same as the research questions (Appendix 1).

Table 1. Summary of the background statistics of the interviewees.

	Years as AD	Education level	International experience	Experience of advertising to children	Age
Art Director E	4 years	Bachelor of Arts		Toilet paper	>30 years
Art Director H	6 years	Bachelor of Graphic Design		Candy and food companies	>30 years
Art Director J	25 years	High School	Yes	Fast food, beer company	>55 years
Art Director K	8 years	Bachelor of Business Administration		Tele operator company and an insurance company	>45 years
Art Director M	10 years	High School	Yes	Eye glasses	>30 years
Art Director P	10 years	Bachelor of Business Administration		Fruit company	>30 years
Art Director To	4 year	Master of Arts	Yes	In many industries	>35 years
Art Director Te	1 year	Bachelor of Graphic Design		Shopping malls and free time activities	>25 years

Table 1 above introduces the background statistics of the interviewees. The table contains interviewees' working experience in the industry as Art Director, their educational background and the industries for whom they have been designing advertising.

As can be seen, interviewees have been working in many industries. Almost all of the interviewed Art Directors had a background of higher education. Some of the interviewees

had been working for a long time as Art Directors. Also the fact that usually people start in the industry as Art Director assistant and then they are promoted to Art Director. Even if they have been a short time as Art Director, it can be assumed that they have experience of the investigated topic and knowledge of the advertising industry in general.

4.4.1 Art Director E

Art Director E has been working for four years in one of Finland's oldest and biggest advertising agency. His educational background is a Bachelor of Arts. His clients have mostly been food companies and a few companies from other industries. He has been helping their customers to find new segments among kids, when their client has been trying to get new revenues. One example was a toilet paper company who wanted to find new customers and they developed a mascot for the brand to attract kids.

” Lambi was looking for ideas to increase sales. They wanted to make a new product from toilet paper and we decided to develop something for kids...”

“...toilet paper isn't the most favorable thing to children, parents buy it. The mascot we developed made children prefer that brand. And the lamb children can paint was also a positive thing to parents.”

He felt that it is often very hard to predict how children are going to react to ads. He also found it very hard to figure out what young people find as “cool” and what they will adapt to. He pointed out that parents are mostly making their decisions with rational facts and children go more with their emotions, and this makes them a trickier segment.

”In this case the product wasn't a cool thing that children adore, so we needed to tell parents a reasonable/rational statement. And then parents became the target.”

“the product has to sell itself to mom, when she's in a shop thinking which yoghurt she's taking for the kid, of course she'll end up taking the healthier one...”

Regarding the relationship between customer companies he felt that usually customers want to say more in their communication that is necessary or even possible. In his opinion, the message should only be giving an answer to why the receiver of the ad should buy the

product. He felt that sometimes customers do not have any clue about these things, or a clear answer, and they try to give new aspects to their customers.

4.4.2 Art Director H

H has been working in one of the oldest media agency as art director for six years and this year she started her own advertising agency. She has studied graphic design and she has a degree in that field. Her customers have been one of Finland's oldest sweets companies and a few other food companies.

She said that when it comes to children, she tries to end up with fun and colorful solutions. She had one customer that made a healthy soda for children. In that case they realized that they needed to be purchased by parents and chosen by kids. They added rational facts to the bottle such as “no additives” or “added sugar” and added colors and a cartoon to please children.

“We wanted to be favored by children and parents; to kids we were a funny soda, but to parents we wanted to be seen as a healthy option”.

“...parents don't want to buy unhealthy stuff for their kids, so we developed healthy soda, that's healthier than coke which contains lots of sugar.”

She felt that children might be victims when it comes to advertising but she added that she has not made any vicious ads targeting children. She also highlighted the point that parents have responsibility for their children and their media usage.

She felt that usually clients know their own markets well and give good briefs to advertising agencies. The freedom of the content of an ad depends on the client. In her opinion the target of advertising is determined by their customers but they can help with that as well.

4.4.3 Art Director J

Art Director J has been working in the industry for 25 years and he has seen big changes in the industry. J has been in high school and after that started to work in the industry. He has worked in almost all of the biggest advertising agencies and he is well known in the industry of advertising. Nowadays he has opened his own office. He has been making advertisements

for one of the world's biggest fast food companies, Mc Donald's, as well as for many other big companies.

He did not agree with any of the models in literature, since he felt that those theories claim that all ads are equal, but that is not the case. Even though he has been making very effective ads for teens and children, he felt that a good ad works for all and a bad one does not work for anyone. His ads have usually brought discussion among people in all ages. A good ad needs to have a story, whoever is the target.

He has also made advertising for a beer company and their target was 15-25 year old people. In this case the target was determined by their customer. In general he felt that customers do not give as good briefs as they could and that sometimes they want to say too much in the ads. He felt that in the process he presents a paid opponent who can give new ways to dramatize the product and help their customer clarify the most important thing they already should know: who will buy the product and why.

Finding the right problem to solve is the key. He had a theory that usually people have a kind of "top-of-mind" list in their head and they try to help their clients get there in the target audience within their own field. That is the reason why companies need to advertize often; to stay on the list.

" They order a manuscript for an ad from us and they tell us what kind of people and who they want to influence and contact. We develop a story and a simple message that will dramatize the product."

When it comes to children as a target, he felt that there is one advantage in the kids segment: they can only keep their focus for a few minutes, so 30 second ads will work for them.

"They are a really challenging target for advertisers. You have got to develop something really smart. Parents buy rationally, kids go with feelings."

In addition to the idea he said earlier, that bad ad does not work for anyone, it means that even if you can capture child's attention, it does not mean that it is a good ad or that it will work. He also felt that children are a difficult audience, since they have their own language and culture and no copywriter can copy them without getting caught.

"There's no point to try to speak like them, coz you just can't. An old fart trying to speak their language, c'mon!"

He did realize that if advertising to children is too aggressive, the result among parents, who make the buying decision, might be negative.

“Is it good or bad what parents start to think about Lego? It can turn also negative if child start to yell at super market--”

4.4.4 Art Director K

Art Director K has been working as an AD for a few years and, nowadays, she is working in a media office making media plans for companies. She has a degree in business administration. Her biggest client for children’s advertising has been for example an operator company and an insurance company.

In the operator case they found new markets in kids who are starting school and they tailored a service to answer their needs. Then they added a mascot for the product to attract children and for the parents they used parental facts such as “know where your child is”. In this case the end user was a child but parents were the purchaser and that is the reason why they had to bring rational facts to the parents.

”Their mascot is a squirrel that is interesting to kids. In the ad the squirrel jumps out from a bag and then all the facts were for parents. A picture for children and facts for parents.”

” To parents we just made a simple message: keep your child close; buy a cell phone for she or he.”

She felt that often customers come to get a boost for their sales from advertising. She has helped a lot their clients find new customers and then tailored a few services for the needs they found for the new segment.

When it comes to advertising to children, she felt that it should speak their language, but how to do that? It is a challenge. She felt that children are so used to see ads everywhere, that it is hard to get their attention and be liable.

“They are used to see ads all around, it’s not just on TV, it’s everywhere”

She also felt that even though it could be effective to target children, parents are making the buying decision, so sometimes there is no use to target kids.

4.4.5 Art Director M

Art Director M has been working all over the world as an art director, from South Africa to Finland. His educational background is high school and after that he had started to work. Now he has been working for five years in Helsinki in one of the biggest advertising agencies.

He said that they help their clients all the time to find new markets and segments and children and teens are often under discussion.

“The client was looking for new segments, and then we wanted to try children. We just try to make a new season and target that to right audience.”

He has made advertising to children, for example, for a company making glasses. They had made research that revealed that 25% of school kids might have problems with their ability to see. They built their campaign under the fact that 25% of children could improve their grades in school, if they could see well, which means, if they had glasses.

“When you think about eye glasses, children aren’t interested in those, it’s more like a negative thing. When it comes to school success, it’s positive thing to parents; that made them our target.”

It was a great success and, of course, targeted to parents even though children were the end user, since he felt that children perceive glasses as an un-cool thing and that is why they focused on parents. He said that it was impossible to get children to demand glasses from their parents, so it was more effective to focus on facts and parents.

The biggest difference between parents and children is the space they leave for feelings in the ads. He said that to parents they represent facts and to children it is more about emotions and tries to affect them in new ways.

“When buying those products, the decision is made because of rational things and that’s why we targeted to parents.”

“They are unpredictable group, you never know what they will adapt to and what they won’t. It might be a small mistake or detail and they don’t like it.”

“You really have to surprise them all again. You can do braver ads for them.”

When speaking about children as a segment, he felt that they are hard to get and very hard to be cool since they are the ones deciding what is cool and what is not. They also spot it if an outsider comes and tries to act like them.

“On the other hand you should speak same language as them, and at the same time they see if you’re fake.”

He also said that when you get it right with children, it becomes a big thing very fast.

“They are the ones that get very excited about things. If you have a very good idea, it will spread really fast among them.”

On the other hand, he said that they sometimes make tests for the ads for the target group, for example one energy drink company wanted to test their ads before launching it. This is of course a very expensive to test ads way and only biggest clients can afford to do this.

4.4.6 Art Director P

Art Director P has been working in advertising almost ten years and as an art director only for a few years. Her educational background is a Bachelor of Business Administration. She has been making ads for a fruit company that had targeted their ads to children.

She felt that it is easy to advertise to children since they go so much after emotions. The trick is to pull the right button when it comes to children. Also the fact that they see ads everywhere makes it trickier.

” It is really hard to made ads for kids. When it’s about parents you can rely on facts, and those facts cannot be used with kids. Kids run after their emotions, parents with brains.”

“You have to know which trick to use. And that’s the hard thing. To be favorable among the coolest kids.”

The fact that children cannot make buying decisions on their own makes them a harder target. The biggest difference between adults and children was that children go after emotions and adults can be affected with facts as well. She also felt that because of the internet, nowadays children all over the world are more similar than before. She mentioned being favorable to the coolest kid in the group and after that, other kids will follow.

When it came to children as a target audience, she felt that even though internet provides a great communication channel, nowadays it is hard to catch their attention since advertising is all around and they are used to seeing it.

“They are used to seeing product placement and all kind of ads.”

4.4.7 Art Director To

Art Director To has been working in different positions in the advertising industry, as an art director only for few years, but on the other side of the table for quite long time. His educational background is a Master of Arts. Since he has worked in London as well, he felt that in Finland advertising to children is just beginning and it is more developed in the USA and in other countries which have been doing advertising for a longer time. In Finland the kids market is not big and also laws and regulations are making it hard.

He felt that children around the world are quite homogeneous, partly because of the internet. Usually kids want to be similar to each other and that is the reason why it is effective to target kids. When it comes to children as a segment, he highlights that being cool is the thing they are looking for. It is a matter of luck and timing.

“It’s hard to predict what is cool and what’s not... Luck plays a big role there.”

“They are always one step before us, they are faster, quicker, and surprisingly good at understanding advertisements.”

When it comes to the relationship between advertising agencies and their clients, sometimes he felt that clients are too strict determining all the emotions they want to capture and sometimes they give a brief without knowing anything. Clients should know who buys the product and who is making the buying decision. If they do not know it, the advertising agency will help them.

“The client decides and determines what they want to order, the target and the audience they want to communicate with.”

4.4.8 Art Director Te

Art Director Te has studied graphic design and he has a degree in that. He has been working as art director for a year now, before that he was working as an AD assistant for many years. He has been designing advertising for malls and free time activities for children and families.

When he was designing free time sport events and such for families, the most important thing he felt was to have a trustworthy image, so that parents would allow their children to participate in the event. Since the event, sport, was quite positive to parents, it was only the fact they paid attention to while for children they tried to make it cool and funny.

” We wanted to get children interested in sports. When it comes to parents, it’s a positive thing if their children are involved in sports. So we wanted to do fun stuff for children and at the same time to be trustworthy, so that they want to bring their children there”

He felt that in general when speaking about families, it includes children and parents and it would be quite costly to separate them more carefully. Since everything costs a lot, customers do not do the research as deeply as they could. The relationship between them and their clients varies a lot.

” ...we can also do some research for our client, after that it’s easier to help them to find right angle and real influencers from their customers.”

“After results from market research they customized a new product for the new segment”

Sometimes the client gives a free hand to do almost anything they want and sometimes the brief is strict. He felt that too often clients are targeting the wrong segment or using wrong statements but, since the client is the paying party, you have to do what you are asked to.

Children as a target was a tricky question for him because he felt that he did not know them anymore and because they can use all the media very well, it is getting harder and harder to get their attention.

“Nowadays I feel like I don’t know kids anymore. We have lots of information about them, we know where they hang out... But as a segment and target...wow! They have their own way to speak, to live and they do recognize when some outsider tries to be like them.”

He felt that they are surprisingly good at understanding ads and the commercial messages also in product placement. In the old days, when there was only television and radio it was easier.

5 Analysis and discussion

This chapter aims to introduce the results of empirical study and address the research questions stated in chapter one, based on the theoretical framework and the empirical data.

5.1 Children and parents as a target audience

When it comes to advertising to parents and children, one can find two different ways to affect parents and children. Advertising can be targeted to parents, but children can play a big role in it (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). It can be also targeted to children and they can be seen as the main influencer (*Ibid.*).

According to the literature the target varies between the decision maker and the influencer (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). Regarding the advertisers, they felt that it is all about money, even if targeting children could be more effective, clients might be afraid that it will not work. This differs a lot from literature, which represented that advertisers try to increase the knowledge among children and brand awareness (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). Clients want to avoid risk and, that is why they are not playing as much with the influencer and purchaser as they could.

“When buying those products, the decision is made because of rational things and that’s why we targeted to parents.” - Art Director M.

On one hand, if the advertised product or service is not cool, advertisers can try to make it cool and favorable to children or they can decide to target parents and try to affect them by facts and other rational reasons. Parents are shaping their child’s consuming habits (Caruana & Vassallo, 2003; Dotson & Hyatt, 2000, p. 220) and they are teaching their children how to read ads (Gaumer & Arnone, 2009). On the other hand peers can play a role in a child’s decision making, as well as ads can influence their wants and needs (Furnham, 2002). A child’s interest and influence level depends on their age (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). If they choose to target children, advertised products or services should be cool and fun.

“When it comes to school success, it’s positive thing to parents; that made them our target.” - Art Director M.

"... A picture for children and facts for parents." - Art Director K.

" To parents we just made a simple message: keep your child close; buy a cell phone for she or he." - Art Director K.

Usually parents are the target, when the advertised thing is positive for them and they decide about the purchase but the child might be the end user. This is when it comes to healthier options in foods and snacks, glasses, telephone operators and such.

"...to kids we were a funny soda, but to parents we wanted to be seen as a healthy option". - Art Director H.

"In this case the product wasn't a cool thing that children adore, so we needed to tell parents a reasonable/rational statement. And then parents became the target." - Art Director E.

One case was about sport outdoor activities and, then, their only motive was to catch children's attention. Another goal was to make a trustworthy image because the event was already favorable to children and positive to adults, they were focusing on appearing trustworthy so that parents would allow their child to attend.

Facts that can be used when it comes to parents are things about health or food in general. The product might be less interesting among children but parents would like to increase their child's consumption of those products. In the advertising process parents are taken into account by healthy facts but also the child's interest is lured by different ways (Sharma & Dasgupta 2009; Geraci, 2004). In general, children are not interested in health products, so their interest level is better raised by adding figures or mascots.

"the product has to sell itself to mom, when she's in a shop thinking which yoghurt she's taking for the kid, of course she'll end up taking the healthier one..." - Art Director E.

"...parents don't want to buy unhealthy stuff for their kids, so we developed healthy soda, that's healthier than coke which contains lots of sugar."
- Art Director H.

To sum up, it seemed that when it was about cool products or services to children, they could be the target and parents did not play a big role. Ads always needed to be trustful or the image could be damaged among parents.

New information was the fact that when the item advertised was something where children were the end user and parents the buying decision maker, it was usually “boring” or “uncool” things that were promoted. Also because customers of advertising agencies are looking for profit, they wanted to maximize the effects of advertising and that is the reason why parents were targeted: they are easier to convince with facts and rely on rationality.

5.2 How the target of advertising is determined and by who?

Deciding on the right target for advertising makes it more effective, by categorizing the decision makers advertising can be targeted to the right people, to the ones that are actually making the buying decision (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009).

Targeting is done in very intelligent ways, usually to the right audience. Art directors felt that usually customers should know how the buying process of their product is made and sometimes their customers did not have any idea. Usually advertising agencies give new angles to their clients about the product and about the segment they have picked.

““The client decides and determines what they want to order, the target and the audience they want to communicate with.” - Art Director To.

”...we can also do some research for our client, after that it’s easier to help them to find right angle and real influencers from their customers.”

- Art Director Te.

” They order a manuscript for an ad from us and they tell us what kind of people and who they want to influence and contact. We develop a story and a simple message that will dramatize the product.” - Art Director J.

Advertising agencies can help their client find out new possibilities by market research. Also new seasons, markets, segments and customers can be found in kids.

“After results from market research they customized a new product for the new segment”- Art Director Te.

“The client was looking for new segments, and then we wanted to try children. We just try to make a new season and target that to right audience.”
- Art Director M.

The one who decides the target varies a lot. According to advertising agencies, sometimes clients know exactly who they are trying to influence and sometimes advertising agencies need to clarify both the message and the segment, if it is too wide or too narrow. Sometimes clients also want to say too much in their advertising which might blur the whole message. In the whole process, the client is the one who decides and is also responsible for the advertisement.

When it comes to advertising agencies and their clients, sometimes they saw the situation a bit differently. Advertisers felt that usually advertising should be focusing on two main points and usually the client wants to add more messages to the ads.

It might be that clients themselves see children as future customers and maybe want to increase their knowledge among them as well as brand loyalty. Since it would demand too many messages in the communication, advertising agencies are the ones that keep the message simple. This might be the reason why ads do not try to catch children, even though it could be good when thinking about the future.

5.3 Children as segment

In this field's literature children are seen as a vulnerable audience, easy to manipulate almost as victims of advertisers (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). This is mainly because of children's limited skills to separate ads from entertainment in general. That is the reason why I wanted to pay attention to how advertisers see children and how advertising planning for them differs from advertising to adults. Advertisers shared the idea that even though ads try to create new demands and wants, children kind of decide what sort of ads they are influenced by (Furnham, 2002, p.130).

Smaller investment products that children can make by themselves are targeted to children directly. These products are for example small snacks, candy, fast food and toys (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009; Dotson & Hyatt, 2000), products that children buy on their own or ask from their parents.

Advertisers shared the same opinion about the main difference between adults and children; children make decisions based on feelings and adults, or in this case parents, are rational buyers (Sharma & Dasgupta, 2009). To convince parents by facts is easier than try to raise the feelings of a child.

”They are a really challenging target for advertisers. You have got to develop something really smart. Parents buy rationally, kids go with feelings.”

- Art Director J.

” It is really hard to made ads for kids. When it’s about parents you can rely on facts, and those facts cannot be used with kids. Kids run after their emotions, parents with brains.”- Art Director P.

However, the advertiser sees children as the most difficult group since they make their decisions based on emotions. They live on their feelings and there is not an easy way to get in to it.

“You have to know which trick to use. And that’s the hard thing. To be favorable among the coolest kids.” - Art Director P.

They have their own way to speak, to live and they do recognize when some outsider tries to be like them.”- Art Director Te.

Also being cool was mentioned in all interviews. Advertisers felt that it is hard to know what is cool among children. Children influence each other and they want to own the same products as their friends own (Furnham, 2002). Advertisers felt that children as a target are a challenging group which was quite an opposite position compared to the literature where children are seen as a victim.

“It’s hard to predict what is cool and what’s not... Luck plays a big role there.” - Art Director To.

“They are always one step before us, they are faster, quicker, and surprisingly good at understanding advertisements.”- Art Director To.

“They are unpredictable group, you never know what they will adapt to and what they won’t. It might be a small mistake or detail and they don’t like it.”
- Art Director M.

“On the other hand you should speak same language as them, and at the same time they see if you’re fake.”- Art Director M.

“There’s no point to try to speak like them, coz you just can’t. An old fart trying to speak their language, c’mon!” - Art Director J.

Also the fact that children are exposed to so many ads in every day makes it harder to get their attention.

“They are used to see ads all around, it’s not just on TV, it’s everywhere”
- Art Director K.

“They are used to seeing product placement and all kind of ads.”
- Art Director P.

“You really have to surprise them all again.” - Art Director M.

They mentioned that it is harder to get their attention and to get it right but, when you get it right, it is easy to become big among young people. This refers to the fact that peers can be the main influencer when it comes to children (Furnham, 2002).

“They are the ones that get very excited about things. If you have a very good idea, it will spread really fast among them.” - Art Director M.

This means that children adapt things from their peers. After they are influenced by their peers and they already have particular wants, they start to search for ads that respond to the desires they already have (Furnham, 2002, p.130).

Children might try to influence their parents by nagging and pestering (Gaurner & Arnore, 2010, p.3). Since they usually do not have their own money for bigger purchases, the purchaser is their parents. Advertiser took into account that fact as well, especially in advertising that is too aggressive.

“Is it good or bad what parents start to think about Lego? It can turn also negative if child start to yell at super market...” - Art Director J.

This was taken into account among advertisers. They did realize that if advertising to children is too aggressive, the result among parents, who take the buying decision, might be negative. After selecting ads children might make a request to their parents about particular products (Furnham, 2002, p.130).

Overall, it seemed that children were a hard target to advertisers, not seen as victims, more like a challenging audience. The biggest challenge among kids was the fact that in the advertiser’s point of view they seem to live by the moment and make decisions based on emotions and feelings. Also, the fact that kids have their own culture makes it difficult for advertisers to reach them, since they cannot speak their language without sounding fake.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the process of making and planning advertising for children and parents, and the role of the advertising agencies. Interviewed topics were how advertisers target children and who decides the target for advertising. The conclusion chapter tries to answer the research questions based on the empirical study. The research focused on two main questions when it comes to advertising to children:

- How is the target audience of advertising determined and by whom: advertising agencies or their clients?
- How do the advertisers see children: as a segment or as a target audience of advertising?

6.1 How target is determined and by who

According to the advertising agencies, situations vary a lot between their clients. Sometimes their client clearly knows their target and segment, sometimes the case was not clear. Most of the advertising agencies have been helping their clients clarify the segment and also find new markets. They have also been trying to find new markets oriented to children. Since the field is very complex and changing all the time, an interactive process is needed.

6.2 Children as segment

It seemed that in the literature children are seen as victims of ads but for advertisers children were a challenging target group. In the literature children's limited ability to understand ads was highlighted. Advertisers felt that usually children are used to see ads all over and that is what makes advertising to them so much harder.

According to literature, being cool is important when advertising to kids. Advertisers did agree on that but they felt it as a challenge since children's skills to read and understand fake coolness is high. Advertising with coolness and other emotional messages was the major difference that advertisers felt when advertising to parents or to children. On the other hand, good parenting was one emotional thing that could be used when advertising to parents.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

Since this research had an advertiser point of view, the other side of the table, marketing managers, could be investigated as well. Suggestions for future research could be to focus in one specific industry, such as the junk food industry, and try to do research for them.

Marketing managers in those companies could be an interesting topic for research.

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Appendix: Interview guide

The discussed themes in the interviews.

1. Situations when the whole **family is the end user**, and **parents are the buyer**, how is the target determined?
2. Situations when a child is the end user and the parents are purchasers? Or a child is the purchaser/decision maker?
 - **toys etc.**
 - **food, snacks, candies**
 - **healthy food vs. junk food**
3. **Who decides the content of ads?**
 - How well do customers understand their segment and target etc.?
 - Who influences and how much?
4. **What kind of segment are kids?**
 - What is effective when advertising to them?
 - How well do they understand ads?