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KRATKO PRETHODNO SAOPŠTENJE / SHORT OR PRELIMINARY REPORT

MEDIA BEHAVIOUR OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: TV AND TV ADVERTISING VIEWING

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyse the TV and TV advertising viewing habits of preschool children. This study uses a qualitative approach based on media diaries, which were completed by the parents of fifteen preschool children over one week. The findings show that the preferable daypart for viewing TV by preschool children is the evening hours. Furthermore, the children mostly view children's oriented TV programmes either alone or with their siblings. The results show that advertising influences children's behaviour. In contrast with several previous studies, this paper does not support the claim that children begin to understand advertising messages from the age of eight as the study shows they understand it at an earlier age. Ultimately, this study confirms that TV advertising is still a convenient tool for communication with preschool children. The findings of this study contribute to the on-going debate about children's TV viewing behaviour and children's TV advertising.*

Key words: *advertisement for children, mass media communication, media consumption, TV commercials, TV watching*

JEL classification: *M37, L82*

INTRODUCTION

A child participates in family consumer decisions and can have five roles: initiator, influencer, decision-maker, buyer and user (Kahle & Close, 2011; Minton & Kahle, 2014). Preschool children do not usually have the role of the buyer because children of this age do not have a regular income and are financially

dependent on their parents (Furnham, 1999). Children can make a significant difference in the decision making of a family even though they do not have any purchasing power (Kaur & Singh, 2006). Thus, children are an attractive target group for marketers (Ohri-Vachaspati et al. 2015). They are easily influenced due to their lack of experience (Iyiola & Dirisu, 2014). It is also assumed that they hardly distinguish the difference between advertisements and regular TV shows (Moore-Shay & Lutz, 2000). Macklin (1987) and Donohue et al. (1980) set the age limit for understanding advertisements to eight years of age. According to Davis (2003) and Boyland and Halford (2013), children are mostly exposed to food, games and toys advertisements and are usually targeted as a user.

Mass media is essential for creating general knowledge about new products and services and raising awareness of existing brands (Sissors & Baron, 2010). Television (TV) represents a prevalent mass medium in Czech households (Nielsen Admosphere, 2017) that influences its viewers and their perception of everyday life (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The amount and variety of TV channels are still growing (Gunina & Kincl, 2017). This growth also entails an increasing number of children's programmes. The effect on children can be positive or negative. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001), TV enhances children's sense of mathematics and the alphabet. Moreover, it develops race equality, kindness and cooperation. On the other hand, Browne and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005) and Anderson and Bushman (2002) state that violence on TV can increase aggressive behaviour in children.

Some researchers, for example, Livingstone (2005) and Ambler (2007), deny direct causality between exposure to advertisements and the impact on children while Kotrba et al. (2013) confirm this connection. The way that advertisements influence children can be viewed from two perspectives. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003) mention the vulnerable child paradigm and the empowered child paradigm. A "vulnerable child" is assumed to lack the cognitive experience that would protect it from the influence of advertising, whereas an "empowered child" is seen as a skilled and critically thinking individual. Studies focusing on the advertising influence on children are generally based on one of these paradigms.

As for advertising content, children are more likely to watch a colourful advertisement (Livingstone & Helsper, 2004) and with cheerful music (Scott, 1990; Bello et al., 2015). Advertisements focusing on boys are mostly situated outdoors and use the power aspect of the message. In contrast, girl-focused advertisements are situated indoors and use tenderness to appeal (Schor & Schor, 2004). Mar-

keters often use children's natural tendencies and stereotypes to catch their attention. Another appeal that is commonly used in children's advertising is the need for maturity. Barbaro and Earp (2008) state that children in advertisements are usually older than the target group so the children consuming the product feel more mature. Further tendencies are the need for love (Schor & Schor, 2004) and sensory stimulation using visual and music effects (Livingstone & Helsper, 2004; Bello et al., 2015).

Scheduling and timing impact TV advertising effectiveness (Gunina et al., 2018). In the case of children's advertising, timing is a crucial factor. If the timing is conveniently arranged, then the advertisement addresses the intended audience and is much more efficient than when presented at an inconvenient time, just like any other form of marketing (Barb & Techedge, 2016; BusinessNews Publishing, 2016). Cotugna (1998) and Byrd-Bredbenner (2002) state the morning hours as the best time to attract small children. According to these authors, this timing is even more convenient during weekends because children stay at home and watch children's shows and programmes.

TV advertising appears to be the most convenient way to attract children and it can affect their development according to Gunter and Gunter (2019). Its popularity among children these days is also supported by Fitzgerald (2018). However, Katz (2009) argues that TV might be on the demise. Likewise, Morrison (2014) points out that streaming is becoming a threat to traditional TV. There might be a decline in TV usage as most teenagers nowadays spend more time on social media than on TV (Premack, 2018). There is an upcoming tendency of multitasking (Carrier et al., 2009; Duff et al., 2014), i.e. doing another activity or using another device while watching TV. According to Enli and Syvertsen (2016), the popularity of TV these days mainly depends on the culture and therefore, the statement that TV is a dead medium cannot be used worldwide. It follows that there is not a united viewpoint on TV and its popularity among children. Such a discrepancy leads to several questions – if, how, with whom, when and what children watch on the TV. Thus, the purpose of this research is to analyse the TV and TV advertising viewing habits of preschool children. The following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1: In what daypart do preschool children consume the most TV content?
- RQ2: What TV content is preferred by preschool children?
- RQ3: With whom do preschool children usually watch TV?
- RQ4: Do children recognise advertising content?
- RQ5: Do advertisements influence preschool children according to their parents?

METHODS

The study used a qualitative approach because it provides a more in-depth and detailed understanding of a studied sphere than quantitative methods. Therefore, the research can be more targeted (Cassel & Symon, 2014). The study was based on media diaries because the diary method can describe phenomena that might not otherwise be accessible to the researcher. It captures ordinary occurrences that could be forgotten if using an interview and the occurrences are registered alongside a timeline (Wildemuth, 2016). It is an unobtrusive data collection tool, focusing solely on one phenomenon so the typical routine of the subject under study is not disrupted and thereby not distorted (Hernon et al., 2004; Wildemuth, 2016).

The analysis used primary data collected by authors. Diaries and questionnaires in paper format were distributed personally to each family, i.e. handed to the parents of preschool children in Český Brod (Czech Republic) who agreed to participate in the research. Respondents were informed of the participation conditions. All parents-respondents were to complete diaries for one week in March 2019, the same for all respondents. The days of the week were one of the studied variables, so bank holidays could influence and distort the results. To avoid such consequences, a typical week without bank holidays was chosen for data collection. Pre-research preceded primary data collection. One respondent participated in pre-research and was not included in the research sample. The respondent had to complete the diary and also enter comments regarding the structure, formulations, question clarity and comprehensibility. According to the pre-research results, the sentence formulations in the diary were slightly modified to be more understandable for respondents.

A parent was the person who completed the diary and questionnaire although the primary information requested was concerning the child's behaviour. The diary was designed to minimise the distortion of the parent's perception. To complete the media diary, a parent simply had to observe the child's media behaviour and describe it in the diary. Researchers were not personally present during the observation to avoid any side influences such as the Hawthorne effect (Adair, 1984). The children were not notified of their parents' observation.

The diary was designed not to be time-consuming for a respondent. The diary consisted of three parts. The first part was designed as 30-minute time blocks. The parent had to mark the cell every time the child watched TV. The second part of the diary focused on the TV medium. The parent had to describe what

TV content their child watched, with whom and what other device(s) they used while watching TV. The third part regarded TV advertising. The parent had to describe if their child actively watched TV advertisements (and which ones) or if the child stopped paying attention during commercial breaks. This part also included questions if the child recognised the change in the content (according to the parents), what type of commercials attracted their child's attention the most, what commercials did the child remember and what brand slogan or jingle they could recall.

The questionnaire included additional questions about the age and the sex of the child and the number of TV sets the household owned. An optional question asked about the average monthly income of the family. Anonymity was secured for all participants: all the diaries and questionnaires were anonymised.

The final research sample consisted of fifteen preschool children between three and six years old from a kindergarten in Český Brod in the Czech Republic. There were nine girls and six boys. Table 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents in the research sample. The size of the sample was stopped at a maximum of fifteen respondents as the sample was found varied and saturated at that point.

Table 1. Research sample, age distribution

Age of a child	3 y.o.	4 y.o.	5 y.o.	6 y.o.
Number of children-respondents	2	5	5	3

Source: own research

After collecting all the completed diaries and questionnaires, the documents were recoded into electronic form. As a next step, some data transformations were made. For the study, the time the children spent watching TV was divided into three dayparts: morning (6 a.m. to 12 noon), afternoon (12 noon to 5 p.m.) and evening (5 p.m. to 10 p.m.). The night hours between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. were excluded from the analysis because no child from the sample watched TV at that time. For the study, TV content was divided into three types: children's channels, non-children's channels and mixed channels. Children's channels are those channels that focus solely on children. They contain fairy tales and exclusive child-oriented shows. Non-children's channels are those that air content focusing on adults and not relevant for children, e.g. Discovery and Prima Krimi. Mixed channels are a combination of the two where the schedule contains programmes for both children and adults.

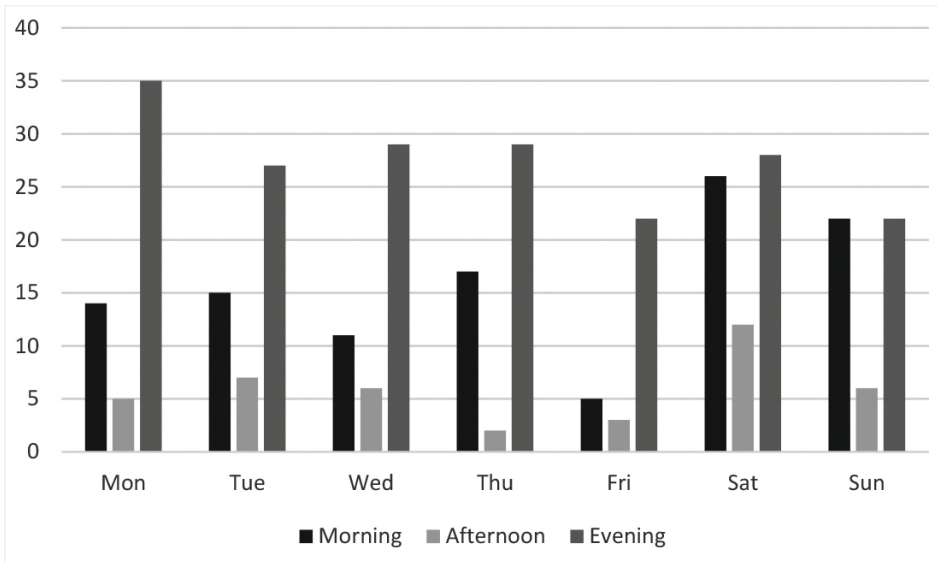
An in-depth qualitative analysis of specific parts of the diaries was used to answer research questions, draw conclusions and make recommendations. Some text data was visualised using graphs or matrixes for better clarity and presentation.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND RESULTS

The results show that the most preferred daypart for watching TV is the evening during all weekdays (*RQ1*). Graph 1 shows on the y-axis how much time in total the children spent watching TV. The y-axis shows the days of the week and the daytimes when children watch TV. In the research sample, children usually watch TV before they go to bed. The most preferred time to watch TV for preschool children is the evening. Some children watch TV also in the morning hours. The watching time in the morning is extended on weekends. The least preferred daytime to watch TV for preschool children is the afternoon. In terms of scheduling, TV viewing behaviour does not indicate to be influenced by sex, age, or the number of TV sets in a household.

The results show that children mostly prefer channels specialised in children's content regardless of age (*RQ2*). The most frequently mentioned channel is ČT :D followed by Nick Jr. or Minimax. In second place are the mixed channels that also contain some programmes for children. The least popular are the non-children's channels. Some parents reported that their children do not want to watch non-children's channels because the children are focused on the TV content – pre-school children do not use another device while watching TV and thus, require content relevant to them. The tendency for multitasking is not as common among the research sample as expected.

The results also show the difference in the media behaviour of different aged preschool children (*RQ3*). Younger children are more likely to be accompanied by an adult while they watch TV. It was found that the older the child is, the less is their need to share the experience with a parent. Watching TV with a sibling is the most preferred option among the whole sample of preschool children.



Graph 1. Preschool children TV viewing behaviour

Source: own research

In terms of advertisement content, the results are highly ambiguous (*RQ4*). Some children cannot distinguish between regular content and ad slots. The advertisements are more fun for them and they dance and enjoy adverts with catchy music. Some children do not actively enjoy the advertisement but still watch it. They can recognise that the content is different, but they still pay attention to it. In several cases, children slightly lost attention during commercial breaks. Some of them stop watching TV when the adverts are on, so they can distinguish the content and are aware of the presence of an advertisement that they want to divest from. It was found that the child's perception of advertising changes with age. Their sex appears to be irrelevant to this.

The results indicate that children are influenced by advertisements across ages (*RQ5*). Even three-year-old children remember advertisements, can recite slogans and recognise specific ads although sometimes they are mistaken and cannot recognise the specific company if the logos are similar. This means that the perception is not tied to the company but to the visual presentation of it. This is not typical for all the studied children. Some of the parents stated that their child is not influenced by advertisements at all because the channels they watch do not contain advertisements. The most frequently mentioned advertisements are programme trailers, which are not considered by parents as advertisements even

though trailers are a form of such. Children usually remember advertisements for food or toys.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results, watching TV is still a popular activity for preschool children. Even though TV is not considered as a modern medium and maybe on the demise (Katz, 2009), it still has its place in children's media consumption patterns. We found that for most of the preschool children, TV is the primary media they use in their free time. An upcoming multitasking trend (Carrier et al., 2009; Duff et al., 2014) or a decline in TV usage (Premack, 2018) are not indicated by this study.

The results of this study partially confirm the findings of Cotugna (1988) and Byrd-Bredbenner (2002) that morning hours are most preferred by children for watching TV and this behaviour is even more pronounced during weekends. As some parents reported, it is caused by the fact that children do not go to kindergarten during weekends but still have the same sleeping pattern. As children are awake early in the morning, and while their parents are still asleep, they can entertain themselves with TV. In this study, such extended weekend viewing hours also appear, although the most preferred daytime for watching TV is always evening (*RQ1*). Since the whole family is at home in the evening, collective TV watching can also be a sort of ritual: a time when everyone sits in front of the screen and watches fairy tales or movies altogether. One could expect that the more TVs that a family has then the more time the child would spend watching TV. However, this assumption is not supported by our results.

The most preferred channels are children's oriented channels with specialised programmes (*RQ2*). The leading children's channel in the Czech Republic is ČT :D. Mixed channels are mostly watched with an adult. Even though these results could be expected, it is essential to verify the fact (reported by some parents) that children do not want to watch non-children's channels or children are simply forbidden to watch non-children's channels, even with their parents.

Our findings agree with ATO – Mediaresearch (2013) that says that children usually watch TV with a sibling or alone (*RQ3*). In this case, the company of the child while watching TV changes with age. According to some parents' reports, the need to share the experience with a parent decreases with the growing age of a child. On the other side, a cause of this may lie with the parents. The older the

child is, the less may be the parent's need to control the child while watching TV, although no respondent reported such a reason.

Our results on the recognition of advertising content (*RQ4*) do not confirm the findings of Macklin (1987) and Donohue et al. (1980) who set the age limit to eight years. They define this age as the starting point when children start to recognise advertising. The sample of this study includes preschool children of the age between three and six years old and some of them could recognise advertisements even though they are younger than the threshold age proposed by Donohue (1980) and Macklin (1987). Future studies should focus on children's IQ and media education of the children as these can be considered as potential influencing factors of children's behaviour towards advertisements. It is more likely that the children who are educated in media would better understand the content and would be able to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content.

On the other hand, the influence of advertisements on children is found across all the ages examined (*RQ5*). The most popular items for children are toys and food as those are items that children want for themselves as mentioned by Furnham (1999). If the advertisement is not relevant to the children, they remember it because of the catchy music background or the use of animated animals or such. Music and visualisation play a significant role in remembering ads.

The results should be considered within the limitations of our qualitative study. A geographic aspect represents one of the limitations since all the children attended the same kindergarten. Therefore, they can be influenced by each other and by the place where they live. Also, this research was conducted during the springtime. It can be assumed that children would spend more time watching TV if, for example, the weather conditions were worse. This could lead to their parents providing incomplete information. The results of this study are encouraging but cannot be generalised because this qualitative research was conducted on a small sample of children. Subsequent quantitative studies with a larger cohort of respondents should be carried out to test these findings. Television could still be considered as a convenient tool for marketing communication with preschool children. Our research shows that children's attitude towards TV and TV advertisements is mostly positive. These findings can be used by TV broadcasters and media agencies to attract the attention of children by better customisation and use of motives that are attractive for children.

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