

Abstract**«#likeme! likethis!»****Media and advertising literacy in place of bans – how children and adolescents deal with advertising in a digitalised environment**

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Advertising is an indispensable part of the media world that children and adolescents are confronted with practically every day. But a lot has changed since the time when advertising “only” reached young viewers, listeners, and readers via television, radio, and the print media. New online forms of advertising are now more personalised, making advertising more difficult to recognise and on social media “advertisers” take the guise of being close friends and acquaintances. Promoting various advertising literacy skills among the young is hence more important today than ever before. The path via accompanying educational measures is more time-consuming and more costly. However, teaching media and advertising skills is a more effective tool than are swiftly imposed bans.

Media and advertising literacy: emotional control is essential

Aided by social media and social influencers, advertising has entered a new and very persuasive evolutionary stage. Even if the consumer is aware that an ad is an ad, this may no longer necessarily stem from an unknown person or a distant idol. Recognising advertising and its intentions is one thing. But to actually be able to speak of advertising literacy, emotional control and impulse control are among the skills that need to be developed. Advertising literacy can be understood as an element of media literacy, whereby the latter sees as its goal a media user who has acquired knowledge about the media himself, critically considers various media contents, learns to use media in a socially responsible way, and can even turn creative aided by the media. For a reflective classification of online advertising, advertisees must, firstly, be cognisant of the fact that offers are selectively devised to speak to various user characteristics and, secondly, know the concrete criteria by which they may differentiate between offers aimed at different target audiences. Since advertising comes in various forms and offers are constantly subject to change, adolescent users must perpetually expand and adapt their cognitive skills and action strategies. In addition, users need

to understand how personalisation techniques are used by online advertising so as to be capable of critically reflecting on their own online behaviour and the corresponding consequences.

Educational work: the effort is worthwhile

Basically speaking there are two strategies for dealing with advertising: one may ban certain types of advertising in given contexts or one may freely allow advertising and take corresponding educational measures to promote advertising literacy among the young advertisees. Bans are quickly implemented but in the long run they do not teach the advertisees how to deal with the range of feelings advertising triggers in them. The path via accompanying educational measures is more time-consuming and more costly. But it is worthwhile.

The social environment in which a child encounters advertising significantly shapes the child's attitudes to it and its evaluations of it. Only by talking about things – e.g. when parents comment on advertising to help a child understand it – can the child learn to process the advertising content and then sort out its own feelings and put its impressions into perspective. If children growing up are disadvantaged in this respect, they may have educational gaps that can only be compensated, to a limited extent and at a later stage, by schooling or by their peer group. Hence it seems all the more crucial for parents to be aided in the task of educating their children with regard to advertising as well as in respect of improving their own advertising literacy skills. Parents bear a great responsibility in this context since they are the key social influencers when it comes to their children's understanding and competence in dealing with media and advertising. The ideal solution is to make easily accessible offers available for teaching media and advertising literacy skills. Schools, especially, have the opportunity to help children and adolescents learn and improve their advertising literacy skills. The educational initiative Media Smart e. V. has been promoting advertising and media literacy in Germany since 2004. The association provides free materials and has a range of practice-oriented offers which are geared to various target groups and works in collaboration with specialists from Germany and abroad. Switzerland goes a step further: since 2018 it has ensured that the topic of advertising literacy is more firmly embedded in the new curriculum and the subject is already treated as of when children first attend primary school (kindergarten) all the way through to the end of the 9th grade.