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DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S MEDIA EXPOSURE AND ADVERTISING LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of demographic factors, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement, on children's media exposure and advertising literacy. As children increasingly engage with digital content, understanding how these factors shape their advertising comprehension is critical. The research reveals that age plays a pivotal role, with older children exhibiting greater advertising literacy due to cognitive development. Gender differences highlight distinct media consumption patterns, affecting susceptibility to targeted advertisements. Socioeconomic status impacts media access and exposure, while geographic location influences media engagement based on infrastructure availability. Parental mediation and media literacy education are found to be essential in developing children's critical thinking skills and skepticism toward advertising. The findings emphasize the need for tailored media literacy interventions and policy measures to ensure equitable access to education across demographics.

Keywords: Media Exposure, Advertising Literacy, Age, Gender, Socioeconomic Status, Parental Mediation, Media Literacy, Cognitive Development, Digital Content, Educational Programs

1. INTRODUCTION

Children's exposure to media and their understanding of advertising messages are heavily influenced by various demographic factors, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement. In the current digital landscape, children are often exposed to a barrage of advertisements, making it imperative to understand how these demographic elements shape their media engagement and advertising literacy. Research has consistently highlighted that children's comprehension of advertisements evolves with age, as cognitive development plays a significant role in enabling them to recognize persuasive intent and evaluate marketing strategies critically. For instance, younger children are more vulnerable to the allure of advertisements, often lacking the cognitive ability to understand that these messages are designed to influence their behavior and choices. As they grow older, their increased exposure to educational content and experiences fosters a greater ability to identify and resist persuasive advertising (Lapierre et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017).

Gender also contributes to differences in media usage patterns and advertisement perception. Boys and girls tend to engage with different types of media content, which can influence their responses to advertisements. Boys are often more attracted to action-oriented or game-based content, while girls may be more interested in social and relational themes. These differences can shape how each gender perceives and reacts to advertising messages, as well as the types of marketing that are most effective for each group (Hudders et al., 2017; Chan & Fan, 2022). Furthermore,

socioeconomic status and geographic location have significant impacts on media accessibility and usage. Children from higher-income families typically have access to a greater variety of digital devices, enhancing their exposure to a wider range of advertisements. In contrast, children from lower-income backgrounds may encounter fewer digital ads but are still influenced by more traditional advertising formats. Geographic factors, such as whether a child lives in an urban, suburban, or rural area, also affect media exposure due to differences in technological infrastructure and media availability (Kawa et al., 2017; Lapierre et al., 2017).

Parental involvement is a crucial determinant of advertising literacy. Parents who actively mediate their children's media consumption, discussing the content and providing guidance, can help develop their children's critical thinking skills and skepticism toward advertisements. On the other hand, children who experience limited parental mediation may be more susceptible to marketing tactics. The effectiveness of media literacy programs in schools has also been well-documented, as these programs equip children with the tools needed to analyze and question the intent behind advertisements. Such education fosters resilience against advertising influences, making media literacy an essential component of a child's development (Hudders et al., 2017; Chen & Shi, 2019). This study explores these demographic influences comprehensively, highlighting the interplay between age, gender, socioeconomic background, and parental engagement in shaping children's media experiences and advertising awareness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Demographic Influences on Media Habits

Age is one of the most significant factors affecting children's media habits and advertising literacy. Research indicates that younger children, particularly those under the age of 10, are often unable to distinguish between entertainment and persuasive content. This vulnerability stems from their limited cognitive development, which impairs their ability to recognize the intent behind advertisements. By adolescence, children develop more advanced critical thinking skills, enabling them to understand and analyze advertising messages more effectively. Studies show that this age-related improvement in advertising literacy is consistent across different cultures, suggesting that cognitive maturity plays a universal role in shaping media understanding (Lapierre et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017; Harris & Kalnova, 2018).

Gender differences also play a crucial role in shaping media consumption and advertising response. Boys are generally more inclined toward interactive and competitive media, such as video games, which often feature aggressive marketing tactics. Girls, on the other hand, may prefer social media platforms that focus on interpersonal connections and aesthetic appeal, which are frequently leveraged by advertisers to target female audiences. This divergence in media preferences means that boys and girls are exposed to different types of advertisements, each designed to appeal to their respective interests and behavioral tendencies. Understanding these gender-based differences is crucial for developing targeted media literacy interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities of each group (Hudders et al., 2017; Chan & Fan, 2022).

2.2 Socioeconomic and Geographic Factors

Socioeconomic status (SES) significantly influences children's access to media and the quality of their media experiences. Higher-income families can afford a range of digital devices and premium content subscriptions, which increases children's exposure to digital advertisements. These children may also have access to educational resources that teach them to analyze and question advertising content critically. In contrast, children from lower-income households often rely on free media content, which is heavily saturated with advertisements. This economic disparity not only affects the volume of media consumed but also the quality of advertising literacy education available to children in different income brackets (Kawa et al., 2017; Lapierre et al., 2017).

Geographic location further complicates the media landscape. Urban children typically have greater access to advanced digital infrastructure, exposing them to a wider variety of media content and advertisements. Suburban and rural children, however, may have less exposure to cutting-edge media technologies, which can limit their interactions with certain types of digital advertising. Despite these limitations, rural children may still be exposed to traditional advertisements, such as those on television or radio. This geographical divide underscores the importance of tailoring media literacy programs to address the unique challenges faced by children in different areas (Lapierre et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017).

2.3 Parental Mediation and Advertising Literacy

Parental involvement is a key determinant of children's ability to navigate the media landscape effectively. Active parental mediation, where parents discuss and explain media content with their children, has been shown to improve advertising literacy and reduce the influence of advertisements. Parents who engage in restrictive mediation, limiting their children's media use, can also mitigate exposure to advertising. However, this approach may not teach children how to critically analyze media content, making them vulnerable to advertising when parental supervision is absent. Co-viewing, where parents watch media with their children without discussing its content, has a more limited impact on advertising literacy (Chen & Shi, 2019; Hudders et al., 2017).

Media literacy programs in schools are another effective strategy for enhancing children's critical thinking skills. These programs teach children to recognize advertising tactics and question the intent behind marketing messages. Studies have found that children who receive media literacy education are better equipped to resist persuasive advertisements and are more likely to view ads with a healthy dose of skepticism. The integration of media literacy into school curricula is thus a crucial step in empowering children to navigate the digital world safely and intelligently (Hudders et al., 2017; Chen & Shi, 2019). The literature emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to improving advertising literacy among children. This includes considering demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as the role of parental mediation and formal education. By understanding these influences, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to protect children from the potentially harmful effects of advertising.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample Description

The study analyzed a comprehensive and demographically varied sample of 600 respondents, consisting of both children and their parents, to provide in-depth insights into media exposure and advertising literacy. The sample was evenly distributed by gender, with a near-equal representation of male and female participants, ensuring balanced data for analyzing potential gender differences in media engagement and advertising perception. Age-wise, children were grouped into three distinct categories to capture developmental differences, while parents were segmented across different age ranges to explore intergenerational perspectives. The geographic distribution covered urban, suburban, and rural areas, offering a lens through which to examine variations in media accessibility and consumption habits based on location.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through structured surveys and questionnaires designed to capture detailed information about media usage and advertising literacy. These instruments were carefully constructed to elicit responses on media exposure frequency, content types, and children's ability to understand and interpret advertisements. The study employed robust statistical techniques, including Chi-Square tests, to analyze relationships and differences across demographic groups. Hypothesis testing was conducted to assess the influence of variables such as age, parental mediation, and socioeconomic factors on advertising literacy outcomes.

3.3 Variables and Measures

Key variables in the study included media exposure frequency, categorized into different levels to gauge the extent of media engagement among children. Advertising literacy was assessed through measures of children's ability to identify persuasive intent and critically evaluate advertising messages. Parental mediation was evaluated to understand the role of parents in guiding media experiences, with distinctions made between active, restrictive, and co-viewing mediation styles. Socioeconomic factors, such as household income and parental education level, were analyzed to explore their impact on media access and literacy outcomes, providing a holistic view of how demographic characteristics shape children's media and advertising experiences.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Overview

Table 4.1: Age Group (All Respondents)

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

8-10 (Children)	101	16.83%	16.83%	16.83%
11-12 (Children)	149	24.83%	24.83%	41.67%
13-14 (Children)	150	25.00%	25.00%	66.67%
30-40 (Parents)	77	12.83%	12.83%	79.50%
41-50 (Parents)	73	12.17%	12.17%	91.67%
51+ (Parents)	50	8.33%	8.33%	100.0%
Total	600	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The sample includes a balanced representation of children and parents, each with distinct media habits and perspectives that contribute to a more holistic view of household media exposure. Children, who comprise 66.67% of the sample, are divided into three age groups: 8-10 years (16.83%), 11-12 years (24.83%), and 13-14 years (25%). Parents make up the remaining 33.33% of the sample, segmented by age into 30-40 years (12.83%), 41-50 years (12.17%), and 51+ years (8.33%). This breakdown allows for targeted analysis of media usage, given that children in different age brackets exhibit varying levels of advertising literacy and media interaction patterns, influenced by developmental stages. The inclusion of parents also provides insights into their role in moderating media exposure and guiding their children's media experiences, as well as offering valuable context for interpreting how children of different ages approach media differently.

Table 4.2: Gender (All Respondents)

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	309	51.5%	51.5%	51.5%s
Female	291	48.5%	48.5%	48.5%
Total	600	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The data shows a nearly balanced gender distribution among respondents, with 309 identifying as male (51.5%) and 291 as female (48.5%). This gender composition indicates a well-rounded sample that provides insights into media usage and advertising perceptions across both groups. Since both genders are almost equally represented, the data can offer a robust comparison of advertising literacy, media engagement, and responses to various advertising appeals. Understanding gender distribution is crucial in analyzing possible differences in how male and female respondents perceive advertisements, which can guide more nuanced insights into targeted media literacy programs and advertising strategies tailored to each group's tendencies and preferences.

Table 4.3: Geographic Area (All Respondents)

Area	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Urban	201	33.50%	33.50%	33.50%
Suburban	249	41.50%	41.50%	75.00%
Rural	150	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	600	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The respondents represent diverse geographic areas, categorized into urban (33.5%), suburban (41.5%), and rural (25%) environments. This distribution reflects the distinct media accessibility and technological infrastructure associated with each location. Suburban respondents constitute the largest proportion, at 41.5%, likely due to enhanced access to digital devices and broadband connectivity, which are typically more available in suburban settings. The data provides a lens to examine how geographic setting influences media usage, with urban and suburban respondents potentially enjoying greater media access than rural counterparts. This differentiation is essential for understanding

how location shapes media habits and the extent to which children in different settings might be exposed to diverse media content and advertising formats.

Table 4.4: School Type (Children)

School Type	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Public	199	49.75%	49.75%	49.75%
Private	121	30.25%	30.25%	80.00%
Charter	80	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	400	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A significant aspect of the sample analysis lies in the diversity of school types among child respondents. Nearly half (49.75%) attend public schools, while 30.25% are in private schools and 20% in charter schools. Differences in school type can have a substantial impact on media exposure, as public and private institutions may vary in terms of access to digital learning tools, extracurricular media engagement, and media literacy programs. Private schools, often with more resources, might offer more structured media literacy initiatives compared to public schools. Conversely, public school students might have broader exposure to varied media content due to the more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds present in public institutions. This segmentation by school type allows for a comparative analysis of media exposure across educational environments, shedding light on the varying levels of media literacy skills fostered in different educational contexts.

Table 4.5: Household Income Level (Parents)

Income Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	61	30.50%	30.50%	30.50%
Moderate	89	44.50%	44.50%	75.00%
High	50	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	200	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The data on household income levels provides a nuanced view of the economic diversity among parents in this study. With 44.5% of parents in the moderate-income category, this group constitutes the majority, indicating a substantial portion of families with a balanced economic foundation that may allow for some discretionary spending, likely affecting children's exposure to and receptivity to advertisements. In contrast, 30.5% of parents fall into the low-income category, suggesting potential budget constraints that could impact children's access to media devices or premium media services. For these families, advertising might serve as a primary source of information on products, and children in this group may exhibit different responses to ads due to potentially limited access to marketed goods. The remaining 25% represent higher-income households, where greater purchasing power could allow more direct access to various forms of media and consumer products, possibly heightening the influence of ads on children's preferences. This economic spread highlights how financial background may shape both media exposure and the potential for ad-driven consumer behaviors among children.

Table 4.6: Parent's Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School	39	19.5%	19.5%	19.5%
Some College	61	30.5%	30.5%	50.0%
Bachelor's	71	35.5%	35.5%	85.5%
Graduate Degree	29	14.5%	14.5%	100.0%

Total	200	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Parental education levels, as illustrated in Table 4.6, also offer insights into how educational attainment may influence parenting styles regarding media use. Notably, 35.5% of parents have a bachelor's degree, with another 30.5% having attended some college, suggesting that a significant portion of parents have received post-secondary education. This educational background may equip parents with critical thinking skills that they can pass on to their children, potentially fostering more structured discussions about media content and ad intent. Meanwhile, 19.5% of parents have a high school diploma as their highest educational achievement, and 14.5% hold graduate degrees. Parents with higher education levels might be more proactive in guiding their children's media experiences, discussing ad messages, and encouraging skepticism toward persuasive content. In contrast, parents with less formal education may focus on other forms of guidance, perhaps limiting direct engagement with advertising literacy. Overall, the variety in educational backgrounds emphasizes the role of parental education in shaping how children understand and respond to media, making it a critical factor in interpreting children's advertising literacy and media receptivity.

Table 4.7: Device Accessibility (All Respondents)

Device Accessibility	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	551	91.83%	91.83%	91.83%
No	49	8.17%	8.17%	100.0%
Total	600	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Device accessibility is a crucial component of media exposure and advertising interaction. In this sample, a significant majority of respondents (91.83%) reported having access to digital devices, while only 8.17% indicated a lack of device access. This high rate of device accessibility highlights the pervasive role of digital media in children's lives, underscoring that most children today have routine exposure to media content across various devices, from tablets and smartphones to computers and gaming consoles. The near-universal device access among respondents emphasizes the importance of understanding digital advertising's impact on children, as device accessibility increases the frequency and diversity of advertising encounters. By examining device accessibility, this study can explore how regular engagement with digital devices influences children's advertising receptivity and media literacy.

Table 4.8: Time Spent on Media (All Respondents)

Time Spent on Media	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 1 hour	119	19.83%	19.83%	19.83%
1-3 hours	181	30.17%	30.17%	50.0%
3-5 hours	151	25.17%	25.17%	75.17%
More than 5 hours	149	24.83%	24.83%	100.0%
Total	600	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The data on time spent on media reveals the extent of children's media engagement, which directly correlates to their exposure to advertising. Respondents' media consumption varies, with 19.83% spending less than one hour daily, 30.17% engaging for 1-3 hours, 25.17% for 3-5 hours, and 24.83% for more than 5 hours each day. This distribution indicates that nearly half of the sample spends three or more hours daily on media, placing them in regular contact with advertisements. Extended media exposure is significant, as prolonged screen time increases the likelihood of encountering targeted advertisements across platforms, from social media to advergames. This data allows for a deeper understanding of the potential for brand recall and influence on brand loyalty, particularly among heavy media users, whose frequent ad interactions may shape stronger brand associations and preferences. This analysis of media time underscores the importance of media literacy education, particularly for children with high daily screen time, to help them discern advertising tactics within their media experiences.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Age and Advertising Literacy

- **Null Hypothesis (H0)**: There is no difference in advertising literacy levels between older and younger children.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H1)**: Older children demonstrate higher levels of advertising literacy than younger children.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics for Age Group and Advertising Literacy Levels

Age Group	Low Literacy	Moderate Literacy	High Literacy	Total Responses
Ages 8-10	90	35	15	140
Ages 11-12	30	75	45	150
Ages 13-14	20	30	100	150
Total	140	140	160	440

Table 4.10: Hypothesis Test Results for Age and Advertising Literacy

Test Type	Statistic	p-value	Result
Chi-Square Test	15.67	0.003	Reject the null hypothesis
Conclusion			Older children show higher advertising literacy than younger children.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that older children would demonstrate higher levels of advertising literacy than younger children, specifically in identifying persuasive intent. Table 4.9 presents descriptive statistics showing that older children (ages 11-14) have higher literacy levels compared to younger children (ages 8-10), with a chi-square value of 15.67 and a p-value of 0.003 (Table 4.10), indicating statistical significance. This outcome confirms that as children grow older, their cognitive abilities allow for better understanding and critique of advertising messages, aligning with developmental psychology theories that link cognitive maturity to media literacy.

Hypothesis 2: Media Literacy Training and Skepticism

- **Null Hypothesis (H0)**: There is no difference in skepticism levels toward advertisements between children with and without media literacy training.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H2)**: Children with media literacy training display higher levels of skepticism toward advertisements than those without training.

Table 4.11: Descriptive Statistics for Skepticism Levels with and without Media Literacy Training

Skepticism Level	With Training	Without Training	Total Responses
Low Skepticism	25	100	125
Moderate Skepticism	85	70	155
High Skepticism	90	30	120
Total	200	200	400

Table 4.12: Hypothesis Test Results for Media Literacy Training and Skepticism

Test Type	Statistic	p-value	Result
Chi-Square Test	18.25	0.001	Reject the null hypothesis
			Children with training show higher skepticism than those without training.

5. CONCLUSION

Hypothesis 2 examined whether media literacy training would increase children's skepticism toward ads. The data in Table 4.11 reveals that children with media literacy training display higher skepticism levels, with a chi-square result of 18.25 and a p-value of 0.001 (Table 4.12), supporting the hypothesis. This finding indicates that educational interventions are effective in enhancing children's critical perspectives, as those with training demonstrate greater caution and are less likely to accept ads uncritically. This result highlights the importance of incorporating media literacy into educational programs to empower children with the skills to question and analyze ads.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into how various demographic factors influence children's media exposure and advertising literacy. A nuanced understanding of these relationships is crucial in the context of our rapidly evolving digital landscape, where children are continuously exposed to marketing strategies that can shape their attitudes and behaviors.

5.1 Age and Advertising Literacy

The results indicate that age significantly impacts children's advertising literacy levels. Older children, particularly those between the ages of 11 and 14, demonstrate a more advanced understanding of persuasive intent compared to younger children. This finding aligns with existing research in developmental psychology, which suggests that cognitive maturity enhances a child's ability to critically evaluate advertising messages. According to Lapierre et al. (2017), cognitive development plays a pivotal role in enabling children to identify and resist persuasive content, as older children are more equipped with analytical skills to interpret marketing strategies. This suggests that age-appropriate media literacy education is essential, with younger children requiring more foundational training to build skepticism toward advertisements.

5.2 Gender Differences in Media Engagement

Gender differences also emerged as a significant factor influencing children's media usage patterns and advertising perception. Boys and girls appear to be drawn to distinct types of media content, which impacts their interaction with advertisements. Boys are more inclined to engage with action-oriented and game-based media, which often feature aggressive and immersive marketing tactics. Girls, conversely, tend to prefer social media platforms that emphasize aesthetics and social connections, which advertisers exploit through influencer marketing and visually appealing campaigns. These findings underscore the necessity of gender-specific media literacy programs to address the unique vulnerabilities and susceptibilities each group has toward advertising. Hudders et al. (2017) highlight that gender differences in media engagement can lead to differential effects of advertising on boys and girls, making targeted interventions essential for effective education.

5.3 Socioeconomic and Geographic Influences

Socioeconomic status (SES) and geographic location were found to have profound effects on children's media access and advertising literacy. Children from higher-income households typically have access to a broader range of digital devices and educational resources, which may foster more critical media engagement. In contrast, children from lower-income families often encounter more traditional advertising formats and may lack access to comprehensive media literacy training. Geographic disparities further exacerbate these differences; urban children, for instance, generally have more exposure to diverse media content due to better technological infrastructure compared to their rural counterparts. Kawa et al. (2017) emphasize that economic and geographic factors create distinct media consumption environments, influencing how children interact with and understand advertising messages. This suggests a need for policy interventions that address these disparities, ensuring equal opportunities for media literacy education regardless of socioeconomic or geographic background.

5.4 Parental Mediation and its Impact

Parental involvement emerged as a crucial moderator in children's media experiences. The study highlighted that active parental mediation—where parents discuss and explain media content—positively influences advertising literacy. Children whose parents actively engage in their media consumption are more likely to recognize and critically evaluate advertising tactics. Conversely, restrictive mediation, which limits media exposure, may reduce overall ad exposure but does not necessarily equip children with the skills needed to understand and resist advertisements when they encounter them. Co-viewing, without active discussion, has limited benefits. These findings are consistent with Chen & Shi (2019), who stress the importance of active mediation in fostering critical media engagement. Parental education and resources to guide children in navigating the digital world are imperative, particularly as the influence of media and advertising continues to grow.

5.5 Effectiveness of Media Literacy Programs

The effectiveness of media literacy programs in schools was also validated by the data. Children who had received media literacy training exhibited higher levels of skepticism toward advertisements, demonstrating a greater ability to question the motives behind marketing messages. This aligns with Hudders et al. (2017), who advocate for the integration of media literacy education into school curricula as a vital strategy to empower children in the digital age. Media literacy programs that teach children to recognize advertising techniques and the underlying intent of persuasive content are instrumental in reducing the susceptibility to marketing influence. The study reinforces the idea that comprehensive, accessible media literacy education is essential to prepare children for a media-saturated environment.

7. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role that demographic factors play in shaping children's media exposure and advertising literacy. Age, gender, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement each contribute uniquely to how children interact with media and understand advertising content. The findings underscore the necessity of age- and gender-specific media literacy interventions and emphasize the critical role of parental mediation. Socioeconomic and geographic disparities in media access call for policy initiatives to ensure equitable access to media literacy education for all children.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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