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The Effectiveness of a Media Literacy Program on a Sample of an Audience

**A dissertation submitted to obtain a PhD in Childhood Studies from
Mass Communication and Child Culture Department**

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2010

Abstract

As avid watchers of television, children are exposed to many advertising messages with every television viewing session. The ultimate responsibility of mediating these messages and coaching children to have a critical eye while watching advertisements lies in the hands of the parents. The purpose of this exploratory study was to explore the feasibility of training mothers on applying advertising literacy skills with their children at home.

Arab-speaking mothers of children aged 6 to 9 were given an eight part online Advertising Literacy course. The aim of the course was to give them the tools and the knowledge to successfully critique advertising with their children.

The study showed that the online advertising literacy course was successful in fostering a dialogue at home with regards to the analysis of advertisements. One of the highlights of the feedback reported is the children's inclination to apply the concepts that they've learnt autonomously and on other programming as well; an indication that the course was in fact successful.

Acknowledgement

As I submit one of the most important documents of my academic life, it would only be fair for me to acknowledge and thank those who made it possible.

I would like to thank my mother without whom I would have never completed this. Her continuous encouragement was the very impetus that pushed me to finalize my dissertation.

I would like to thank my advisors Dr. Eatimad Khalaf and Dr. Mona Omran for their support especially in moments when I felt overwhelmed. I knew I could always rely on them. I would also like to thank Dr. Mohammad Moawad and Dr. Mona Gad for their valuable input as readers on my defense committee.

Throughout this journey there have been friends who have stood by me and have always been there to help whenever I needed them. Rasha El Ibiary, your support has been priceless. Azza Yehia, your encouragement till the last day was exactly what I needed to keep going.

And finally my circle of friends and my beloved family who have always supported me with: “you can do it”...and I did.

Dedication

To my first friend and teacher... mum

English Summary

One of the main concerns families have are of the effect of commercial messages on their children. Billions of US dollars are being spent every year on advertising in the Arab world. As avid watchers of television, children are exposed to many advertising messages with every television viewing session. The ultimate responsibility of mediating these messages and coaching children to have a critical eye while watching advertisements lies in the hands of the parents. Viewed as the vulnerable members of society, their constant engagement with television more than other activities in their lives, the impact of television on children has received great interest from the academic research community especially when it comes to the impact of advertising.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to explore the feasibility of training mothers on applying advertising literacy skills with their children at home. Arab-speaking mothers of children aged 6 to 9 were given an eight part online Advertising Literacy course. The aim of the course was to give them the tools and the knowledge to successfully critique advertising with their children.

A one-group pretest-posttest study design was used. This design is also known as pre-experimental and a before-and-after design. In this design a pretest measurement is administered then the treatment/intervention (or the independent variable) is applied and the final stage is the administering of a post-test. The same single group is tested twice and the amount of change between pre and post test is obtained.

Following the pretest, mothers were sent a lesson every week which included a power point presentation, activities, related videos and images and before receiving the subsequent lesson, mothers were sent a feedback evaluation form for the lesson. At the end of the research, a post test (containing the same questions that were sent in the pretest with an additional section of general course feedback) was sent to the mothers.

The sampling method for this study is a combination between volunteer/convenience sampling and snowballing. On the onset of the study 32 mothers started the program and upon its closure 14 mothers had completed it.

The program consisted of 8 lessons with related activities and videos. The eight topics the program focused on were

advertising economics, brands, words, camera shots, music and sound effects, advertising tricks, the use of characters and personalities in advertisements and finally, product packaging as a form of advertisement.

The study showed that the online advertising literacy course was successful in fostering a dialogue at home with regards to the analysis of advertisements. With regards to their level of motivation not all mothers were equally motivated. Their energy at times seemed to wane and there were sometimes delays in providing feedback.

One of the highlights of the feedback reported is the children's inclination to apply the concepts that they've learnt autonomously and on other programming as well, closely analyzing the sounds, music, words and other techniques that they've learnt. This is an indication that the course was in fact successful. Another highlight is the mothers' reporting that the program provided a platform for increased interaction between themselves and their children.

The researcher's recommendations expanding the sample size as well as the scope of the study to include other areas of media literacy.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Children's exposure to the media and the importance of parental supervision has been the focus of scholars over the years. Back in 1976, John Abel dismissed the roles of television and family are on equal footing when it comes to being socializing agents for children. This view "fails to see the family in its proper perspective as a mediator of such outside influences as TV."¹

The phrase 'media-rich homes' has been coined to describe the abundance of media goods that are available in the modern home. In her book 'Young People and New Media', Sonia Livingstone says that this abundance may be attributed to several factors such as the "reduction in price for media goods," "the growth of mobile media", "the continual process of innovation in the design and marketing of existing technologies" and the "diversification of media forms."²

Livingstone outlines the significance of the 'media-rich' homes by highlighting the fact that children are now autonomous in their use of media, a phenomenon that parents are not

¹ John Abel, The Family and Child Television Viewing, 1976, p. 335.

² Sonia Livingstone, Young People and New Media, 2002, p. 121.

necessarily against. Parents “stress the supposed benefits that a media-rich home brings to the children in terms of both safety (as outside space is increasingly seen as dangerous) and education (as media use at home is increasingly construed as influential in supporting the role of the school), as well as simply being valued for enhancing leisure.”³

Consequently, as Livingstone explains in her book, there has been a change in the “kinds of social practices which surround and accompany viewing” such as solitary viewing as bedrooms into “private living rooms” especially for the well-off: “enforced conviviality being a thing of the past for all but the poor.”⁴

In this respect, and with most parents working full-time, they have a more challenging job when it comes to monitoring or supervising the quantity and quality of their children’s media usage. “The sheer number of media in the home can make it difficult to keep track of what children should and shouldn’t be exposed to.”⁵

³ Ibid, p. 122

⁴ Ibid, p. 136

⁵ Amy Jordan, Public Policy and Private Practice, 2001, p. 658.