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Advertising to Children: The Language of Manipulation

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Advertising aimed at children has become one of the most lucrative areas of marketing. What appears to be harmless advertisement is in fact a form of communication designed to influence desires and behaviors. Marketers prey on the gullibility of children by employing carefully crafted linguistic strategies that capture their attention and stimulate their desire to own. Children are recognized as a "triple market": current consumers with independent purchasing power, influencers of parental spending, and future adult consumers whose brand preferences are shaped early (Zlatanova-Pazheva, 2019; Janardhnam & Chetana, 2019). To ensure that the goal is achieved, the advertising industry ensures that intentional linguistic strategies are crafted and customized with the sole purpose to arouse children's attention and curiosity. The strategies used by marketers ensure that every word, phrase, slogan, and even jingles serve a deliberate psychological function.

Advertisers often exploit children's limited ability to recognize the motives behind messages sent in the advertisements. Terms such as "new", "delicious", "Surprise inside!", and "collect them all" are purposely repeated endlessly because they tap into excitement and curiosity.



These phrases bypass rational thought and target emotions like sense of owning, and the fear of missing out. For them, the message feels more like exciting promises than attempts to persuade, making them more likely to accept the content without question. Since their inferencing skills are still developing, they are easy targets for marketing strategies and more likely to be influenced.

It can be observed that the slogans used in advertisements is simple, repetitive, and sometimes incorporate onomatopoeia to enhance memory and stimulate desire, known as pester power. The slogan "Pop, crunch and munch away – fun flavor getaway" is an excellent example. The word "away" rhymes with "getaway", showing a smooth and catchy flow. Meanwhile, "Pop" and "Crunch" are onomatopoeia that evoke vivid sensory experiences of taste and sound, making the message more engaging. Lastly, the phrase "fun flavor getaway" conveys a sense of adventure and enjoyment that appeals to children's imagination, thereby heightening their desire to own the product.



The incorporation of auditory cues, particularly jingles, represents a powerful form of persuasion in advertisements. Through jingles, a brand can be more memorable and recognized by children as they are naturally more responsive to rhythmic and repetitive stimuli. Some jingles can even result in earworms, a phenomenon where a tune continuously replays in one's mind. This reinforces brand recall and emotional connection, thereby increasing children's desire to own the advertised product (McDermott et al., 2021). McDonald's jingle – "I'm lovin' it" creates a sense of happiness and contentment, emotions that align with the brand's promise of pleasure. The jingle created in 2003 by Justin Timberlake has become the most recognizable advertising jingle, portraying McDonald's image as a joyful and familiar part of everyday life.



Advertising language is particularly a powerful tool for shaping their perceptions and desires.

Through simple language, catchy slogans, and memorable jingles, marketers engage children's imagination and emotions, guiding their preferences and consumer identities. As children are less capable of distinguishing between information and persuasion, it makes them the perfect target for these tactics to work. Hence, recognizing how advertising language operates is crucial to understanding how early exposure shapes children's consumer identities at an early age.

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