



REPORT 5/2020

Content Department

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**Representation of gender stereotypes in  
toy and game advertising (linear  
television and video-sharing platforms)  
during the Christmas campaign 2019-  
2020**

## Conclusions

The Catalan Audiovisual Council has been analysing the presence and extent of gender stereotyping in toy and game adverts broadcast on television during the Christmas campaign since 2001. In the 2018-2019 campaign, the study was extended to include advertising on children's YouTube channels.

The same criteria as previous years was used to define the universe for the 2019-2020 campaign: on linear television, the first broadcast of each different advert shown between 10 October and 15 December 2019 on channels that broadcast throughout Catalonia; on video-sharing platforms, channels featuring children and / or teenagers with videos containing toy promotions uploaded to YouTube between 10 October and 15 December 2019.

The universe defined for this Christmas campaign contained 107 commercials broadcast on linear television, which is fewer than the 186 of the previous year. On YouTube, we analysed 114 videos with toy and game advertising from 9 different channels.

### **The growing importance of toy advertising on child and teenage YouTube channels.**

The importance of the phenomenon of toy advertising on children's YouTube channels is revealed by the number of subscriptions and views they have. On 10 January 2020, the 9 channels had 36 million subscriptions in all, while the videos containing toy advertising on those channels had 128 million views.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, this format is still growing, as the following two quantitative parameters show. With regard to subscriptions, the 6 channels that were also analysed in the 2018-2019 campaign have seen a 76% increase in subscriptions (from 18 to 32 million) in one year.

The view data reveals even greater growth. Views of the videos uploaded at the beginning of the study period (October 2019) doubled between 31 October and 10 January (average increase of 98%).

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<sup>1</sup> According to YouTube data.

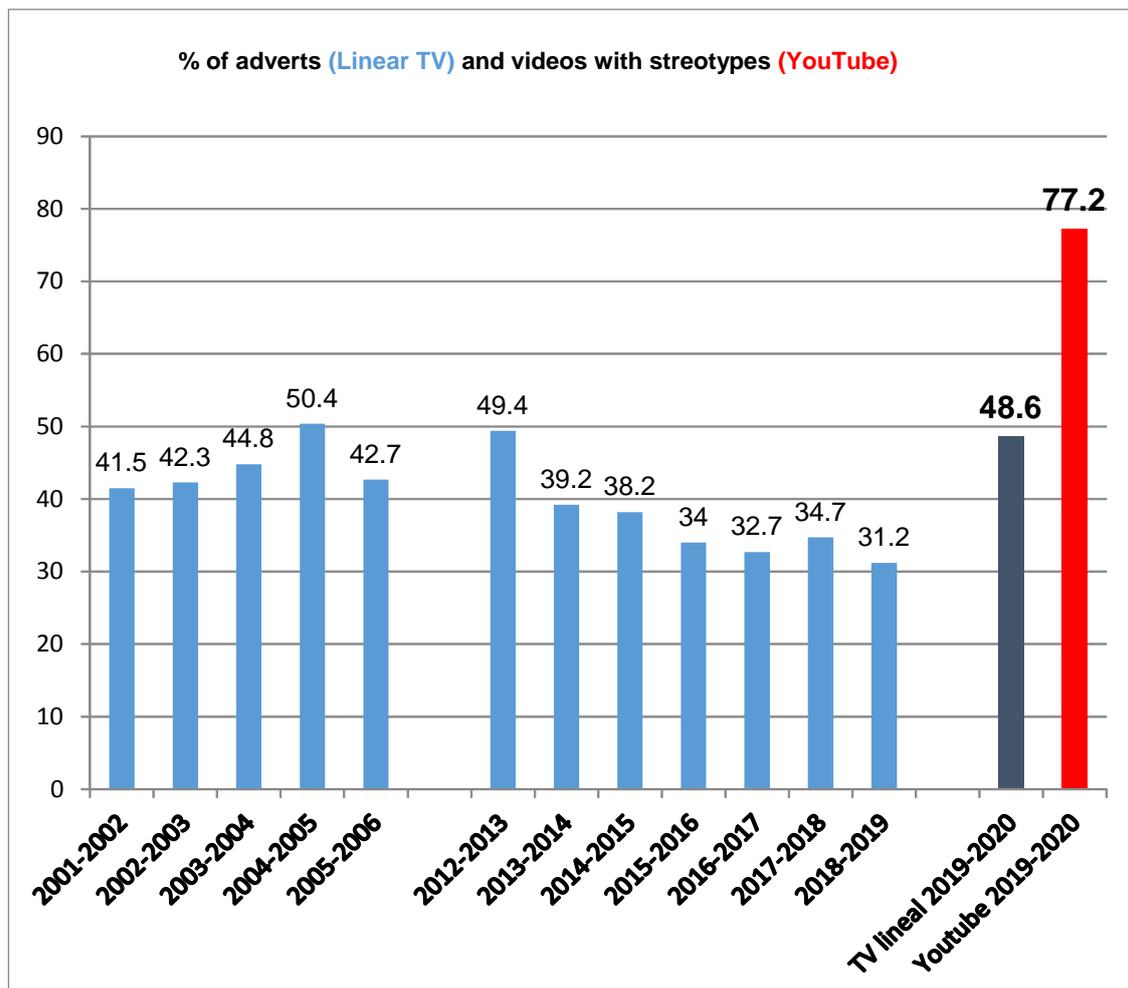
**Gender stereotyping is far more common on YouTube videos than on linear television.**

A full 77.2% of the toy advertising videos uploaded to children's during the period analysed include at least one gender stereotype. The sample comprises 88 videos with over 117 million views as of 10 January 2020.

Turning to linear television, during the 2019-2020 campaign, 48.1% of commercials contain gender stereotypes, which is the highest figure since 2012-2013.

If we classify these **stereotypes**, on video-sharing platforms, 46.6% of videos containing some kind of stereotype are female stereotypes. On linear television, there is a 20% drop in female stereotypes compared to the previous campaign, although they still account for the majority (69.1% of the total).

**Figure 1. Stereotypes on linear television commercials (2001-2002 to 2019-2020) and children's YouTube videos (2019-2020)**



**Adverts creates links between certain types of toys and gender through the actors who appear in them.**

TV commercials and YouTube videos coincide in showing a relationship between the toy being promoted and the gender of the child who features in the advert.

Most television advertising (60.1%) creates a conceptual gender separation among the target audience by exclusively featuring girls (38.7%) or boys (20.4%) in the advert. A mere 4 out of 10 adverts show boys and girls playing together.

Television advertising primarily offers girls dolls and figurines (for primary symbolic play) and imitation reality toys (related to physical appearance); adverts for boys offer figurines and accessories (related to action) and miniature vehicles.

This phenomenon is also found on the **videos of YouTube channels depending on whether the YouTuber is male or female**. Dolls and their accessories are promoted only on girls' YouTube channels; while boys' YouTube channels promote miniature vehicles and toy weapons.

As such, the discourse on both linear television and YouTube adverts segregates boys' and girls' play and does not show girls playing with miniature vehicles or boys playing with dolls.

### **The gender-typed narrative of toy advertising**

Using symbolic play, adverts portray a world where only girls play maternal and caring roles. Likewise, only girls play at having parties (singing and dancing) and at taking care of how they look or looking in the mirror. Boys, in contrast, but also in symbolic play, are the only children who use weapons or drive vehicles.

In 8 out of 10 **adverts exclusively featuring girls**, their role is to look after dolls or pets.

Advertising also has different characteristics when it comes to form. TV adverts for toys that only feature girls are predominantly in pastel and pink tones (75%), take place indoors in almost half of cases (47.2%), and the voiceover is always female.

Videos made by YouTubers contain some of the features of television advertising, although the narrative differs. Only girls are seen as being concerned about how they look and playing maternal roles.

In relation to **form**, on 100% of channels exclusively featuring girls, **diminutives** are used repeatedly, while in 75% of cases the use of pink is common.

Television commercials **exclusively featuring boys** display different characteristics. In almost half of product promotions (47.4%), the product is related to play fighting, either through skill and aiming games or action figurines.

In terms of form, dark colours were found in a quarter of the sample (26.3%), pink and pastel colours were never used, and the voiceover was almost always male (89.5%).

Like television, male YouTube videos also attribute adventure, fighting and competition - three actions found in all of the videos analysed - exclusively to boys, and never use pink. The language used to target the audience on these channels is always in the masculine form.

The **language** used in television adverts is dramatically different according to whether they feature exclusively girls or boys.

In adverts with girls, the language conceptually relates to **the private sphere and emotions** in the context of caring for others, which is symbolically represented by playing with dolls, figurines and pets. As the figure below shows, the most common words used are cry, grow up, discover, for real, hair, accessories, teardrop and dummy.

In adverts with boys, the most frequently found words (attack, jump, shadow, get ready, defence and speed), have connotations of fighting, competition and strength - three areas that are not used in the language of commercials exclusively with girls.



## **Parents who appear in child YouTube videos also perpetuate stereotypical roles**

One characteristic feature of these videos, which are longer than TV adverts and can therefore develop a narrative further, is that the mother and father figures also play stereotypical roles.

Parents appear to a varying extent on all of the channels analysed, but in most their roles are gender-typed. The mother usually plays primary symbolic games (playing at being mum) with the girl or is the caregiver, while the father participates in competitions or fighting games with boy YouTubers.

In 2 of the 4 channels in which the mother and father both appear, they also have unequal roles: when the game has to do with sports challenges and competition or a task requiring manual dexterity is being done, it is the father sharing game with the child, whereas non-competitive activities and primary symbolic play involve the mother.

## **Toy advertising on children's YouTube channels perpetuates and reinforces stereotypical perceptions of women**

Our analysis of toy advertising on linear television shows that almost half (48.6%) of commercials broadcast continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes.

On the internet, however, which has its own forms of language and narrative, gender stereotypes are even more common than on television: 3 out of 4 YouTube videos (77.2%) contain advertising narratives that are loaded with gender stereotypes. In addition, new audiovisual services enable gender stereotypes to be more easily disseminated because content can easily be spread over the internet.

For instance, in the context of this study alone, the videos analysed that depict a stereotypical image of the roles of girls (and their mothers) and boys (and their fathers) had more than 117 million views. Although the messages they carry are varied, they all define separate realms for girls and boys starting from the realm of play, and assign them differentiated roles: women are responsible for the private sphere, motherhood and how they look, while men are responsible for competing and fighting.