



Consell
de l'Audiovisual
de Catalunya

REPORT

Content Department

Online advertising on children's and adolescents' YouTube channels

Conclusions

The purpose of the report is to analyse the presence of advertising content on young YouTubers' channels. For the research we selected 15 channels that are located in Spain and that have some of the largest audiences (in terms of subscriptions and views). In addition, some of the channels have a very high creation rate, uploading 180 videos in the last year (1 video every 2 days). To delimit the study, we analysed videos uploaded between 10 and 31 October 2019.

The popularity of child and teenage YouTubers is clear, both from the high number of subscriptions (50 million in total for the channels analysed) and video views (16 billion). These are enormous audience figures and theoretically a very specific audience profile (children and teenagers), which makes this content ideal for advertisers to target minors.

Indeed, this report shows that **almost all videos analysed (96.5%) contain some kind of commercial** presented by the YouTuber, additionally to those shown on the platform. Furthermore, two thirds of the videos analysed include promotions for various products, services or brands. In addition to these, we should take into account the impact of advertising broadcast by YouTube itself, including both audiovisual ads and overlays, which were not studied in this report.

Figure 1. Example of advertising (channel merchandising) in one of the videos analysed



Type of product advertised

The **type of products advertised** is obviously linked to the channel audience: the largest category are toys (34.4% of all promotions), followed by channel merchandising (23.8%), fashion products (18%) and video consoles and games (11.6%).

It is worth highlighting the importance of YouTubers' own **merchandising** here, which accounts for 23.8% of all products promoted (mainly books and fashion items). Beyond the actual good that is advertised, merchandising conveys the YouTuber's ability to gain children's and adolescents' loyalty and, therefore, to influence what they consume.

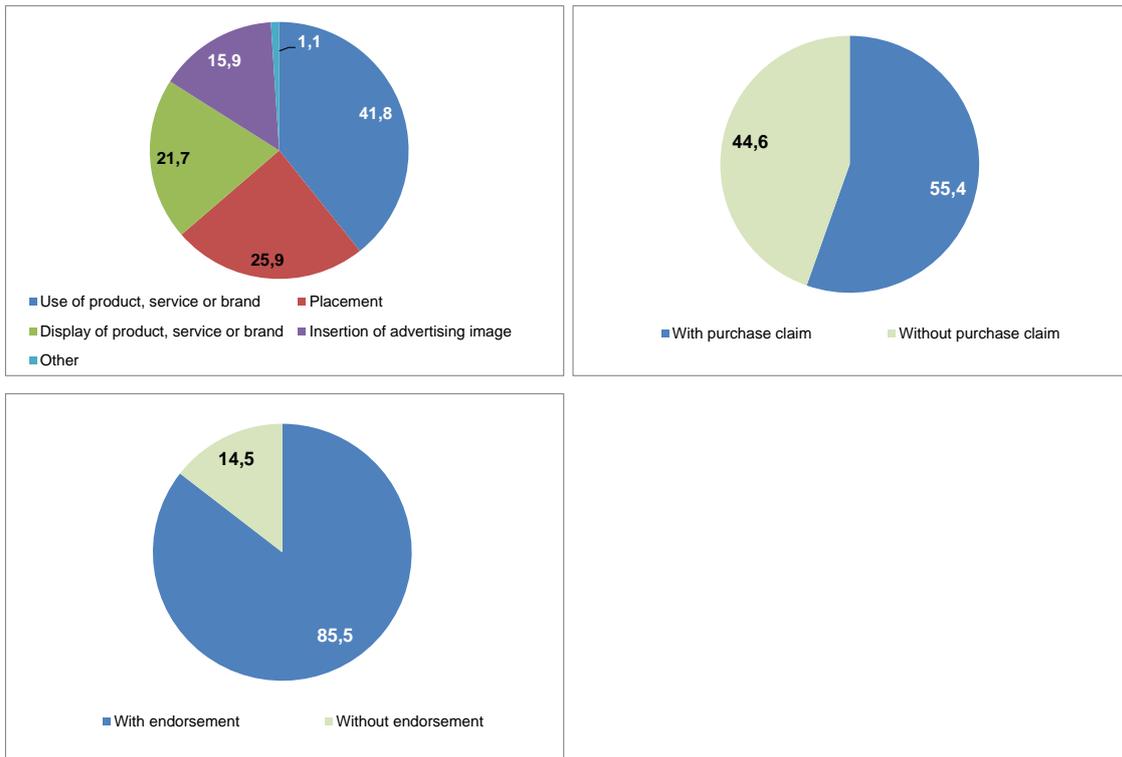
With regard to some of the most sensitive product types when it comes to protecting minors from audiovisual content, in the **adverts for video games** (11.6% of all products), none show the recommended age rating (PEGI) and some feature children playing games that are not recommended for their age.

We also found that all adverts of food and beverages (albeit to a lesser extent, 1.6%) concern to high-sugar products.

Advert characteristics

We cross-analysed the characteristics of the adverts under study and found that the archetypal advert is a YouTuber using a product (primarily playing with it) and showing very clear enjoyment and delight (repeatedly saying things like 'How pretty! Awesome! I love it! Look at her long hair, how cool!'). Moreover, most videos include a purchase reference (such as "Now on sale in all bookstores and on Amazon", or a link to buy them directly).

Figure 2. Characteristics of adverts in the videos analysed



Our analysis of the different adverts found reveals the importance of the YouTuber's interaction with the product, service or brand: the vast majority of adverts (63.5%) feature use of the product (41.8%) or interaction without use, such as unboxing and reviews (21.7%).

Nevertheless, both examples entail the YouTuber recreating an apparently day-to-day situation, making it possible to exploit children's naivety or lack of experience in distinguishing editorial content from advertising.

Disclosure of advertising content

Of the child and teen YouTuber videos analysed, almost three out of four (71.1%) do not inform the viewer of advertising content in their videos in any way.

In the videos that do include advertising disclosure, most (19.3% of the videos with adverts) utilises the YouTube function for content creators which comprises an initial 20-second text overlay saying "Includes paid promotion". A further 9.6% include informative overlay messages as part of the video content, and one includes a verbal message.

However, although these videos inform viewers about advertising, the disclosure uses terms such as "paid promotion", "endorsed by" and "sponsored", which are not easily comprehensible among the target audience - children.

Furthermore, the messages are displayed only for a maximum of 20 seconds, in videos that are 10 to 15 minutes long. In other words, the advertising disclosure is visible for approximately 6% of the total video time, and not necessarily in sync with the advert.

In conclusion

Use of video-sharing platforms is one of the hallmarks of the new digital environment. Statistics show that children and teenagers use them intensively, even more so than traditional audiovisual media. However, there is far less protection of minors from advertising on user-generated content (such as YouTuber videos).

This report reveals that children are bombarded with adverts (which almost all videos feature) and that the intensity is very high (the advertising primarily involves a YouTuber interacting with a product). YouTubers also create links to their audience, as the proliferation of merchandising suggests.

Therefore, due to way adverts are presented with clear prominence, lack of comprehensible signalling and the context in which they are shown, they cause confusion among the audience in relation to its commercial aim and they become surreptitious advertising which, in addition, they take advantage of children's and adolescents' inexperience and credulity.