

Children's Media Literacy Education in the Reception of Television Advertising: An Examination of the Family's Role in Children's Media Literacy Education

Abdelali Yousfi

University Mohamed Boudiaf of M'Sila

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Information and Communication Sciences

Email: abdelali.yousfi@univ-msila.dz

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Abstract

Television is one of the media whose content children encounter, particularly during the earliest stages of their lives. It contributes to the child's socialization and has increasingly come to compete with the family in performing its educational function. Television can reach children at an early age and with considerable intensity through the various programs it broadcasts, including advertising. Such advertising helps to implant promotional messages in children's minds. Given the sensitivity of this stage of human development, media literacy education is essential to guide and rationalize children's reception of such content, with advertising among its most significant forms. Television advertising, through promotional spots for goods and services, carries messages that contain ideas, values, and behaviors which children receive, are drawn to, accept, and may seek to imitate. Media literacy education is therefore an important means of raising children's awareness, accompanying them, and guiding them so that they may benefit from the positive aspects of such content while avoiding its negative effects. Numerous media, sociological, and psychological studies have demonstrated the influence of television advertising on children's upbringing, particularly through its effects on children's behavior and the values they acquire during socialization. Television has consequently come to rival the family in educating the child, instilling cultural and social values that may either correspond to or conflict with societal values. In addition to creating desires and persuading viewers to purchase goods or obtain services, television advertising plays a major role in changing habits and presenting moral models and social values that may not accord with those of the society in which the child lives. Although advertising is primarily oriented toward directing individuals toward consumption, its content is also grounded in shifts in values and morals. It transmits values through sound, image, video, music, and audiovisual effects, all of which operate as persuasive appeals intended to influence the consumer. Since children constitute a vulnerable group requiring care and guidance, and since television content, including both programs and advertising, may carry negative values and ideas that conflict with those prevailing in society and may affect children's psychological, physical, health-related,

and cognitive development, media literacy education emerges as an essential tool. Its role centers on teaching the individual, and the child in particular, how to engage consciously with media and communication technologies, while developing critical thinking and learning skills in support of sound socialization. The family in which the child grows up is the first institution to undertake this role. As the primary nucleus that embraces children and as the environment in which they spend most of their time, particularly during the early stages of life, the family contributes significantly to their socialization. It therefore bears a major responsibility for their media literacy education by guiding them toward positive, conscious engagement with television content, programs, and advertising messages, as well as the ideas and information they convey. This responsibility falls primarily upon parents and guardians, who are entrusted with caring for children and ensuring their education and socialization. It is therefore necessary for the family to be aware of advertising content, to pay attention to media literacy education, and to rely upon it in raising children, in order to benefit from the positive aspects of television advertising while avoiding its negative effects and risks. Hence, this study sheds light on the relationship between the child and television advertising content, the nature of its influence on the child's personality, socialization and behavior, and the role of media literacy education as both a concept and an important tool for guiding and teaching children to engage consciously with such advertising content. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the family in this regard, especially in rationalizing children's media needs and protecting them from the risks of media, particularly television and television advertising.

Keywords: media literacy education; child; television advertising; family.

Introduction

The contemporary media and communication landscape is saturated with a vast amount of media content, some of which accords with society's values, ethics, culture, and beliefs. On the other hand, it may present distorted content, information, and images, making these communication media dangerous instruments in the falsification of reality, cultures, and other matters. This leads to the transmission of misleading or distorted information to audiences, in addition to the pornographic content that these media may promote, including sex, drugs, verbal and physical violence, and extremism, which may lead to the destruction of educational and moral values among youth, adolescents, and children in particular.

In light of this reality, with its positive and negative aspects, produced by modern communication technology, it is necessary to consider an appropriate approach that protects generations of children and adolescents from the negative effects of transmitted messages, including advertising messages on television and its satellite channels. From this standpoint, the efforts of the concerned parties, including the family and others, should be combined to accompany the child and protect him from the risks posed by television.

It is necessary to know and understand the objectives and risks of the programs broadcast by television, so that the viewer moves from the role of recipient to the role of analyzing, understanding, and grasping the meanings transmitted by programs, and works to benefit from their positive aspects while avoiding their negative aspects and risks to their personal and social life.

This is achieved through media literacy education as a new concept. Media literacy education has become a subject of interest to researchers and families. It means evaluating and guiding the recipient's behavior so that he responds positively to media content, including television. It is the responsibility of several parties in society, beginning with the family, the school, the mosque, and others.

The role of the family in media literacy education is considered one of the essential pillars of a child's socialization. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to disseminating and teaching the principles of media literacy education and to establishing foundations for dealing with the messages to which the child is exposed through various media, in order to help the audience avoid the negative effects of these media and to develop methods of critical thinking toward media content, to raise awareness of proper engagement with, and use of, what the media provide, as well as strengthening the family's role in disseminating the concepts of media literacy education among children.

If a person is not media literate, sweeping intellectual and ideological risks will overtake their mind and thought, and will undoubtedly be reflected in their behavior and interactions with family and society. They may also create negative behaviors and problems within the family and society.

It is generally agreed that the media play a major role in our societies and that the family also has a major role, whether greater or lesser, in shaping the influence of these media. The family must know and equip itself with the procedures and methods that help it provide its members, from childhood, with the skills for conscious, positive interaction with modern media and communication technologies and for using them positively.

The Concept and Importance of Media Literacy Education

Among the most prominent contemporary issues with which media literacy education is concerned is educating younger generations in particular about ways of understanding and assessing matters, enabling them to acquire the skills that help them confront issues rather than fear and surrender, isolation and rejection, or justification, and helping them understand the values of sincerity, love of the homeland, proper belonging, respect for others, just freedom, confronting rumors and misinformation, and combating intellectual deviations and deviants by appropriate means.

The current generation's exposure to the effects of mass media in forming its culture, determining its patterns of behavior, and acquiring concepts, values, habits, and attitudes has increased greatly in light of the advancement of communication and information technology and the congestion of space with satellites that broadcast their programs day and night. Television is among these media. At the family level, media literacy education aims to teach children to collect, evaluate, and use information from modern and traditional media, and to provide them with the skills necessary to express themselves in a professional and civilized manner.

Technological developments, especially because they allow us to choose exposure to a vast number of television and satellite channels on the one hand and to a considerable abundance of information, images, and videos on the other, compel us to select the best for our children and family members through the optimal use of the positive aspects of media, television, and modern technological

means of communication. This is achieved through continuous training in how to use them, guiding children, accustoming them to the necessary skills for dealing with these technologies, and protecting them from their negative aspects, given that the media have come to occupy a large space in socialization, influence, guidance, and the education of young children.

The concept of media literacy education in dealing with the media encompasses a set of pedagogical practices that aim to develop independent, critical individuals through a better understanding of the nature of the media and how they function. It also provides parents and teachers with better knowledge of the cultural surroundings and environment with which children come into contact.”¹

The concept of media literacy education in dealing with the media also includes a set of pedagogical practices that aim to develop independent, critical individuals through knowledge of the nature of the media and how they function. It also provides parents and teachers with a better understanding of the surroundings and the cultural environment to which children are exposed.²

Media literacy education is a compound concept composed of the two words “education” and “media.” It is derived from the Western semantic context, especially the Anglo-Saxon one, before being generalized to most developed countries and, more modestly, to developing countries. It is a translation of the English term Media Education and the French term *éducation aux médias*, and it refers to education in the reception of media content or to critical education in the reception of media discourse. Some consider it a translation of the English term Media Literacy, which is called “media literacy.”³

Among the groups in society for whom great care should be taken to protect them from the slippages and risks of the media are children, especially because this stage is characterized by the child’s difficulty in distinguishing and criticizing content.

The issue of the media's influence on children has generated both critical perspectives and others that support the role television plays in children’s lives, since it is not possible to determine definitively whether the effect is positive or negative. The matter requires examining several data points or variables, including the child’s personality and predispositions, the content of programs broadcast by television stations, and various cultural patterns. Some parents and educators believe that many television programs encourage children to acquire a degraded level of taste that is not appropriate for a sound social life. Others believe that television gives a child an incorrect understanding of right and wrong regarding social behavior. Since the minds of children and adolescents are highly sensitive and prepared to be influenced by what they watch and to adapt to

¹ Abdelouahab Boukhenoufa, “Educating the Arab Child to Deal with Audiovisual Media: What Role for the School and the Family?,” paper presented at the Arab Conference on Children’s Television, organized by the Arab States Broadcasting Union, Tunis, April 3–6, 2002, 2.

² France, Ministry of Youth and Sports, *The Impact of Television on Young Audiences: Problems, Responses, and Proposals*, vol. 1 (Marly-le-Roi: INJEP, July 4, 1999), 261.

³ Mahmoud Abd al-Ati Muslim et al., previously cited, 4; Rashid ibn Hussein al-Abd al-Karim, “School Curricula and the Development of Critical Faculties toward the Media,” working paper presented at the Media Education Conference, Riyadh, 2007, 3.

it, and given the great effectiveness of audiovisual media in education and instruction, if exposure to television programs is left without selection of topics and content, it will have a significant negative effect on young viewers' psyches. These effects will be reflected in their personalities and formation.

In the same context, some believe that although television is attractive to the child and helps bring the family together because of its power of attraction and influence, this does not prevent it from being a factor in the development of individual behavior and from encouraging the child to withdraw from reality and seclude himself in front of the television screen.⁴ Thereby entrenching social isolation.

Another group believes that watching television is not problematic; it only needs to be controlled by watching good and appropriate programs. Some scholars and parents believe that it contributes to the development of positive values. According to Dr. Fatima Abdel Samad, television is an effective tool for instilling values and fostering an atmosphere of solidarity and understanding in family relationships; without it, members of the same family would not gather at times when certain programs are broadcast. In addition, it helps students develop their ability to evaluate and select programs.⁵

Television: Definition of Television

A means of transmitting image and sound simultaneously by electrical impulse, and it is the most important audiovisual means of communication with the masses through the broadcasting of specific programs.⁶

Definition of Advertising

Linguistically: "It is the manifestation and public declaration of something or some matter, and it comes from the root of the verb 'ashhara,' meaning to manifest and declare publicly."⁷

Terminologically: Advertising is "a set of activities that aim at communication and oral or visual address to a selected group of individuals for the purpose of informing and influencing them to purchase a commodity, deal with and request a service, or change their attitudes toward certain ideas, brands, or institutions in return for a paid fee."⁸

Speaking of advertising's power to influence audiences, P. Le Lay's 2004 statement provoked significant debate. It became a major media event when he said: "For the advertising message to be effective for the recipient, the audience's brain must be available, and the role of our programs is to make it available: that is, by entertaining and relaxing it in order to prepare it between two messages. What we sell to Coca-Cola is this available human brain time."⁹ This demonstrates

⁴ Abd al-Razzaq al-Dulaimi, *Media and the Child* (Amman, Jordan: Dar al-Masirah for Publishing, Distribution, and Printing, 2012), 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶ Muhammad Munir Hijab, *The Media Dictionary* (Cairo: Dar al-Fajr for Publishing and Distribution), 67.

⁷ Saad Salman al-Mashhadani, *Television Advertising and Its Influence on the Audience*, 1st ed. (Amman, Jordan: Dar Osama for Publishing and Distribution, 2012), 43.

⁸ Mona al-Hadidi, *Advertising*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriyyah al-Lubnaniyyah, 2002), 28.

⁹ J. Rifkin, *L'âge de l'accès: La révolution de la nouvelle économie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

advertising's reliance on studied methods that seek to attract consumers to purchase consumer commodities and persuade them to accept them.

Advertising is a commercial process by which goods, services, and ideas are presented in the media to appeal to and attract audiences to acquire a product or request a particular service. Advertising, in its content, conveys values, meanings, behaviors, and ideas intended to persuade the consumer audience to acquire a particular commodity or product. However, those messages and contents may be positive or negative; that is, they may contain contents, meanings, values, and ideas that conflict with the prevailing social and moral values in our society and with its customs, norms, and traditions.

The Concept of Television Advertising

It is defined as "a persuasive and influential communicative message, which is sometimes of a dual nature, one aspect relating to the commodity and the other to values, attitudes, and behavior."¹⁰

It has also been defined as "a form of paid and nonpersonal communication for the promotion of goods or services on behalf of a known sponsor, using television as a medium."¹¹

Television is considered one of the most important media and one of the closest to individuals, since it combines sound and image, which advertisers seek to employ in order to enter every home and influence the individual's culture by studying their attitudes, interests, inclinations, dreams, and cultural, moral, and religious values, to attract the consumer mentally, affectively, and behaviorally. Therefore, television advertising is regarded as social, economic, and media behavior intended to convey a particular message, drawing on all the means used in other expressive arts, such as cinema, theater, and photography, and presenting a large number of emotional and cultural appeals, whether desired or repressed, in the individual or the child.

Early childhood is one of the most prominent stages of development in a child's life, during which the child advances toward independence and self-reliance, moving from the home environment to the kindergarten environment, where he begins to interact with his environment and to understand the dimensions of it that are appropriate to his development. At the same time, socialization begins, along with the acquisition of values, concepts, attitudes, and social habits, and the child learns to distinguish right from wrong, even if he does not understand why something is right or wrong.

Children at various stages of their lives have their own interests and activities that stem from their intense love of play and amusement. Among the interests that have emerged in the present age, as a result of the rapid scientific and technological progress of the current era, are watching television and the programs it offers.

¹⁰ Fahd ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Shumaimri, *Media Literacy Education* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1st ed., 2010), 127.

¹¹ Marwa Murtada al-Hamamasi, *The Use of Comedy in Television Advertising and Its Influence on the Child*, 1st ed. (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Arabi lil-Maarif, 2014), 14.

The Concept of the Child and Childhood

Linguistically, the child is the newborn, and the plural is children; the term “child” may be singular or collective.¹²

Childhood is considered one of the stages of an individual’s life and is characterized by specific behavioral characteristics and patterns. It is the decisive stage in the formation of the individual’s personality. Children do not constitute a homogeneous category; rather, they differ according to their developmental stages. For this reason, there is disagreement over determining the age that may be described as childhood. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that “childhood is the period between the third and the fifteenth or sixteenth year of life.”¹³ Childhood is the first stage in the formation and development of the personality, beginning at birth and continuing until puberty.¹⁴

The child has multiple needs, the most important of which are nutrition, health care, psychological needs, the need for reassurance and security, and the media-related need to receive media content. Ahmad Hasan al-Khamisi states in his book *Raising Children through the Media*: “The media have invaded our homes in this contemporary age, foremost among them television, that device which has attracted both adults and children, who remain fixed before it, never tiring of it and accepting no substitute for it. So that television does not steal all our children’s time and take us right and left according to the orientations of those in charge of its channels, fathers, mothers, and educators should regulate viewing and establish educational orientations and rules. We therefore call on all members of the family to adhere to them so that they may benefit from watching the various programs that bring them refined culture and wholesome enjoyment.” He offered valuable guidance that may serve as a guide for effective viewing that benefits children and mothers.

- Accustoming children to discipline at specific times for watching television. To persuade them of this, family sessions should be held to discuss television and the purpose of each family member’s viewing. It is preferable to establish a plan that each family member adheres to as much as possible, and for each family member to pledge before the family not to increase their share of viewing. This is a means by which the child becomes accustomed to self-discipline.
- Mothers should watch television with their children to regulate it and discuss what they see and hear, so that they do not become passive viewers.
- Monitoring what children watch on satellite channels, since much of what attracts children’s attention harms them and affects them negatively.
- Diversifying programs, from intellectual to cultural, scientific, educational, and entertainment programs, and so on, and directing them toward this, so that their viewing is not limited only to animated films.

¹² Ihab Abd al-Khaliq Muhammad Ali, *The Social Adjustment of Street Children*, 1st ed. (Egypt: Dar al-Wafa, 2013), 92.

¹³ Nuri Jaafar, *Science Fiction Story Literature and Children’s Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Iraq: Dar Thaqafat al-Atfal al-Iraqiyyah, 1989), 48.

¹⁴ Muhammad Said Faraj, *Culture, Childhood, and Society* (Alexandria: Manshat al-Maarif, 1993), 17.

- Television should not be made a means of promotion and filling leisure time; rather, we should diversify our preferred hobbies, such as reading, sports, and social activities, and so forth, because diversifying how time is filled allows us to enjoy our lives more than if we limited ourselves to a single activity. We should help our children understand that doing work or practicing a talent yields more beneficial results than watching television.¹⁵

The Relationship of Television Advertising to Children and Adolescents

Discussion of the media's role in our society necessarily leads us to highlight television's role in this regard, given its unique capacity to communicate ideas and messages through the advanced use of movement, image, and sound. This influential capacity has been manifested in its contribution, alongside basic social organizations such as the family, the school, and society, to the establishment and consolidation of social values.¹⁶

It is an important medium that combines direct and indirect visual and auditory means and is closer to social interaction among children than other media. In light of this importance, television is considered the most significant intellectual and educational channel due to its clear and significant influence on individuals' behavior and attitudes.

Television is a media outlet that enters homes, confronts individuals, and addresses them. Through this, it has taken from the family many of its mechanisms of socialization, since many of the programs shown on Arab television are imported and do not always align with the social environment, which helps widen the gap between known values, customs, and traditions and the changing circumstances.

This influence, however, does not occur immediately; rather, television leaves an effect over the long term, since values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior cannot be modified except over long periods of time, which may be longer or shorter depending on how deeply they have penetrated the individual's self and according to the strength of the influences.¹⁷

It plays an important role in people's lives, especially among children, who watch it most and spend the most time following programs intended for them. It is therefore necessary to understand the positive and negative effects of such viewing on children's lives.¹⁸

Studies in this field have shown that the child becomes confused and is led into the illusion that what he watches on the screen is reality. Television is therefore considered a mirror that reflects reality and truth as they are, without intervention or modification. However, practical reality confirms television's capacity for dramatic manipulation in the acted scene presented to children. It is also capable of presenting an approximation of reality through artistic and technological

¹⁵ Ahmad Hasan al-Khamisi, *Raising Children through the Media* (Syria: Dar al-Nahar for Publishing and Distribution; Dar al-Qalam al-Arabi, 2014), 84–87.

¹⁶ Misbah al-Khayr, "The Relationship between the Media and Juvenile Delinquency," *Journal of Social and Criminal Research*, no. 1 (1981): 123.

¹⁷ Waad Ibrahim al-Amir, *The Role of Television in Family Values*, 1st ed. (Dar Ghaida for Publishing and Distribution, 2013), 80–81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

interventions, even though program producers know that the child cannot link psychological inputs to salient phenomena and that only what is distinctive remains in his memory.¹⁹

The Positive and Negative Effects of Television and Satellite Channels on Children

Television has become one of the most important cultural, entertainment, informational, and commercial media. No other medium can compete with it for children and adults; television constitutes an important visual presence within the family, influencing children, and has begun to share, alongside the father and mother, the responsibility for preparing and educating children.²⁰

Television has become the primary competitor in raising children, especially with the proliferation of programs and even satellite channels devoted to children that contribute to children's socialization and the inculcation of values far removed from the traditions of the family or society. The child therefore absorbs both good and bad, which affects the child's development in ways parents may not desire, since they cannot fully monitor emotional development.²¹

Children, adolescents, and youth are influenced by television films, series, and advertising messages to the point of unquestioningly imitating imaginary heroes and committing crimes. This imitation has been behind the seclusion and distancing of the younger generation and adolescents from the older generation in terms of customs, traditions, and ideas.

Negative Effects

Satellite channels have brought us several negative effects, resulting from their inappropriate use, that can destroy the structures and culture of society. These may be summarized as follows:²²

The spread of television's rhythm among children: The programs and works broadcast by these channels, presented in exciting artistic forms, make children feel that life is full of competition, conflict, and crime. For many children, what they watch on screen appears to be a mirror reflecting the real world, which seeps into their psyches and, consequently, into the reality of their lives, so that the rhythm of their movements becomes violent.

The crystallization of impressions about ideas, persons, and events: What these channels broadcast will produce in children the formation of many impressions about societies and individuals. Some of these impressions cannot later be changed easily and are formed from a perspective different from what prevails in the child's environment, which leads to admiration, or what has been called fascination, which leads to despair.

The widening gap between children's culture and social culture: Although children's culture is a subculture, it shares several elements with adult culture. However, the family's role in socialization has begun to decline. Thus, children themselves, especially in middle and late childhood, feel that the stimuli used by the family in the process of acculturation differ greatly from the stimuli

¹⁹ Iman Abd al-Azim al-Tayyib and Iman Ahmad, previously cited, 9–10.

²⁰ Rafiq Ahmad Alawi, "Television between Positives and Negatives," no. 349, Jumada, 1436 AH.

²¹ Fatima Mustafa Mahrous, "The Effect of Television on Children."

²² Ibrahim Yahiaoui and Nour Eddine Djebali, *The Influence of Children's Satellite Channels on Their Social Values* (Amman: Dar al-Ayyam for Publishing and Distribution, 2014), 51–52.

transmitted by incoming television, and this may lead the child to diminish the importance of family stimuli.

The reduction of children's social relationships: Continuous exposure to television leads children, in part, to turn away from active participation in social relations beyond the limits of social groups, since their preoccupation with exposure distances them from meetings with others, from play, from the exchange of opinions, and from other methods essential for children's social development.

Television channels also offer features that attract children, including diverse content, choice, and continuous broadcasting at all hours of the day. There is therefore a possibility that increasing hours of children's exposure to these channels may lead them to turn to these channels and move partially away from recreational activities, especially play. However, recreation is considered an educational need of great importance.

These satellite channels may also, through their programs, influence the formation of children, as the programs they watch may lead to isolation, separation from reality, and an escape from confronting life's problems.

Watching television deprives children of the time that should have been devoted to acquiring direct experiences and expertise from life.²³ The models created by watching television are not models to be emulated, for most of them are simplified to reconcile the elements of profit and entertainment above all else.

Television advertising is a set of diverse messages delivered during the time sold by television to the audience to introduce a commodity, service, or idea, through forms and content that influence its information, inclinations, values, consumer behavior, actions, and all other cultural components.

Television advertising influences the child's culture through two stages:

The first stage: advertising messages and those who produce them possess a superiority before which the child's helplessness becomes evident, and this superiority arouses the child's desire to imitate the content of some advertising messages, especially those that satisfy a desire he has.

The second stage: In this stage, the child realizes that acquiring this advertising content, rather, any skill would increase his sense of control over his environment. Whatever his family, peers, or those who represent him in advertising content do, he wishes to do as well. It is also observed that his desires sometimes exceed the limits of his capabilities, and he affirms to himself that everything others can do, he can perform.²⁴

Deception in advertising occurs through the use of misleading or false information to persuade viewers to purchase a product.

- Exaggeration in advertising and praise of the commodity in an ambiguous manner without facts on which to rely.
- Subliminal advertising, which works to create imaginary needs, transform them into basic needs, and promote and sell to the individual what he does not need.

²³ Atef Adly al-Eid, *Media and the Culture of the Arab Child*, previously cited, 86–87.

²⁴ Inas Muhammad Ghazal, *Television Advertisements and Children's Culture: A Sociological Study* (Alexandria, Egypt: Dar al-Jami'ah al-Jadidah for Publishing, 2001), 34–37.

- Advertisements that exploit children, as they take advantage of their innocence, their quick persuasion, and their attachment to things, thereby causing them to pressure their families to purchase goods and request services they do not need.
- Poor taste in advertising, whereby advertising constitutes an offense to public taste and becomes one of the manifestations of cultural, auditory, linguistic, and value pollution, as it negatively affects the value system.
- The use of sexual innuendo.

Television advertising affects the child by socializing him into consumer behavior and by increasing his demands, leading him to reject his family reality. This may lead to various forms of conflict within the family and within the child himself, causing him frustration or leading him to engage in abnormal behaviors to obtain money to acquire what is promoted in advertisements and to satisfy the needs promoted by advertising.

In addition, it affects his culture, values, language, the determination of his priorities and needs, and the formation of his taste.

Some viewers see television advertising as merely a commercial activity for promoting goods and services, but this is not correct. Television advertising is an influential, persuasive communication with a dual nature: one aspect is linked to the commodity, and the other relates to values, attitudes, and behavior.

For example, whether or not the viewer is persuaded to purchase the commodity, he is influenced by the advertising characters, their appearance, their manner of speaking, their movements, and their behavior, independently of the product or service promoted in the advertisement. With repeated television ad broadcasts, this influence becomes entrenched, making television advertising one of the strongest means of persuasion, influence, and social change.²⁵

Many studies on television advertising and its impact on children show that children's general view of advertisements on television is largely one of unquestioning acceptance. The child sees everything presented in television advertisements as credible and not open to discussion, and this provides a great and certain opportunity for influence on the child to occur. According to several studies, television advertisements may be both positive and negative at the same time. On the one hand, they can develop the child's culture and abilities and satisfy his cultural, psychological, social, behavioral, and personal needs. On the other hand, they can have a destructive effect through the new culture they instill in the child, one that is opposed to society's original culture.²⁶

Positive Effects

Some studies have also confirmed that there are certain positive social effects of satellite channels on the child, which may be summarized as follows:

- Opening new horizons for children to become acquainted with different worlds. The child watches a series about space wars and, along with it, animated dialogue about complex

²⁵ Fahd ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Shumaimri, previously cited, 127.

²⁶ Inas Muhammad Ghazal, *Television Advertisements and Children's Culture: A Sociological Study* (Alexandria, Egypt: Dar al-Jami'ah al-Jadidah for Publishing, 2001), 12.

machines and devices that stimulate his imagination and interest him. Some programs also transport him to other worlds of experience through numerous programs about the seas, oceans, the animal world, and other peoples.²⁷

Television currently plays an active role in people's lives, bringing them, whether they are at home or anywhere else, science, knowledge, experience, amusement, and entertainment. It is also considered one of the most effective media for developing and guiding people.²⁸

- It refines the child's emotions and feelings in accordance with his desires for amusement and entertainment and trains his senses from an early age in listening, connection, and imagination.²⁹
- It develops the child's imagination and nourishes his abilities, as it transports him to new worlds that had not occurred to him and teaches him innovative methods of thinking and behavior.
- It develops the child's mental and intellectual faculties and satisfies his curiosity through its cultural programs.
- Television also prepares the child for school through simple objective tests, learning the letters of the alphabet, and their early success in reading.³⁰

The transmission of social heritage and commendable social values through some series and special programs is also among these positive effects.

Many satellite programs and television advertising spots carry values that differ from our own. They also compete with our values and customs. Nevertheless, many young people who watch these programs absorb these values under the slogan of imitating the West, and this imitation leads to a value conflict between what the child carries and the family's values.

Consequently, television plays an important role in people's lives, especially among children, who watch it most and devote more time to programs intended for them. It is therefore necessary to understand the positive and negative effects of these viewings on children's lives.³¹

Studies in this field have shown that the child becomes confused and is led into the illusion that what he watches on the screen is reality. Television is therefore considered a mirror that reflects reality and truth as they are, without intervention or modification. However, practical reality confirms television's capacity for dramatic manipulation in the acted scene presented to children. It is also capable of presenting an approximation of reality through artistic and technological

²⁷ Nawaf Adwan, "The Child and Television," Arab Radio and Television Journal, Arab States Broadcasting Union, Tunis, no. 2 (1990): 58.

²⁸ Iman Abd al-Azim al-Tayyib and Iman Ahmad, *The Role of Media in Education*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Taybah Foundation for Publishing and Distribution), 8.

²⁹ Ibrahim Yahiaoui and Nour Eddine Djebali, previously cited, 52.

³⁰ Muhammad Munir Saad al-Din, *Studies in Media Literacy Education*, 1st ed. (Sidon, Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Asriyyah, 1415 AH/1995), 111.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

interventions, even though program producers know that the child cannot link psychological inputs to salient phenomena and that only what is distinctive remains in his memory.³²

Television also prepares the child for school through simple objective tests, learning the letters of the alphabet, and early success in reading. However, the child's intensive viewing of television may lead to two negative factors:

1. Satisfaction with listening to a speech from one side, which leads to the child understanding only a small proportion and retaining only a very small proportion of it.
2. Being distracted from moving the speech apparatus and from verbal dialogue during viewing leads to weakness in the speech reception center, which means the occurrence of a disorder in the process of pronunciation.³³

Reports on childhood indicate that the child spends 900 hours in school and more than 1,000 hours watching television programs, which tips the balance in favor of television, so that it plays the role of educator at home and that of the school at the same time.

The Role of the Family in Children's Media Literacy Education

Definition

The family is the protective shield, bound together by a strong bond that instills values and morals in individuals. It is the first institution that receives the human creature from the moment he opens his eyes to the light.

Dr. Sanaa al-Khuli defines it as "a basic, permanent social group and a principal social system. It is not only the basis of the existence of society but also the source of morals, the first support for regulating behavior, and the framework from which the human being receives his first lessons in social life."

The family is the first group in which the child lives, feels a sense of belonging, and learns to deal with others to satisfy their needs.

Burgess and Locke defined the family as "a group of persons connected by the bonds of marriage, blood, or adoption, who live under one roof, interact with one another according to specific social roles, and create and maintain a common cultural pattern."³⁴

Perhaps one of the most important cultural roles of the family is monitoring what is presented to children through the media. The family cannot prevent what is presented in the media. However, it can monitor the programs presented to its children, because some programs contain cultural and thought patterns that do not align with what the family seeks in the sound upbringing of its children.³⁵

In any human society, the family is considered the first and most important mediator in the child's acculturation. With the introduction of new factors, such as the television set, this role has been

³² Iman Abd al-Azim al-Tayyib and Iman Ahmad, previously cited, 9–10.

³³ Iman Abd al-Azim al-Tayyib and Iman Ahmad, previously cited, 14–15.

³⁴ Ibrahim Abdallah Nasser and Atef Omar ibn Tarif, *Introduction to Education*, 1st ed. (Dar al-Fikr).

³⁵ Abd al-Aziz Khalid al-Sharif, *Media and Education*, 1st ed. (Dar Yafa al-Ilmiyyah for Publishing and Distribution, 2014), 13–14.

affected. The hours of communication within the family have become limited, and children have begun to seek answers to their questions in media devices and social networks. All this has led to a weakening of the family's role in shaping children's educational culture.³⁶

Among the family's roles in shaping educational culture is its concern with the moral and behavioral aspects of teaching children virtues and refined moral principles, and guiding them toward upright behavior.

Dr. Fatima Mustafa Mahrous summarized the role of parents in this regard in one of her studies:

Reducing the use of television to one to two hours daily, while paying attention to quality.

Keeping television sets out of children's rooms and becoming familiar with the content of the programs children watch, even if those programs are intended for them.

Answering children's questions about the new concepts they have seen and correcting their mistaken beliefs.

Not using television or video games before going to school or before doing homework, and setting specific times for them.

Accustoming the child to distinguish between reality and imagination, and not to imitate everything he sees.³⁷

In addition, parents' media literacy education requires possessing and adhering to a set of characteristics that help parents develop their children's use of the media. These characteristics include knowledge, selection, modification and correction, competition, and balance.

The Characteristic of Knowledge

This means that parents should be aware of the reality of the media in terms of their characteristics and features, how to use them, how to benefit from them, and how to avoid their disadvantages. It also means knowledge of the motives for using them and the gratifications they provide to users. The existence of a cognitive background regarding the reality of media practices and the stakes involved also enables parents better to manage their children's exposure to the media, making them more persuasive and influential.

Modification and Correction

This refers to modifying and correcting the media-shaped mental image held by the public. This mental image is formed as a result of observing the reality, approaches, and forms of behavior presented by the media, especially since children and adolescents are more in need than others of modifying and correcting what they are exposed to in the media and in social life in general, given the nature of the age stage through which they are passing.

The Characteristic of Appropriateness

This means children's use of media that agree with and are compatible with age, gender, and the purpose of use, since children's mental capacities vary and differ across the different stages of life

³⁶ Mahmoud Hasan Ismail, *Media and Children's Culture*, 1st ed. (Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 2011), 108–9.

³⁷ Fatima Mustafa Mahrous, "The Effect of Television on Children."

and according to the circumstances of their children, their leisure time, or the time available to them for using media.

The Characteristic of Balance

This means using media that achieve psychological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral balance for children by aligning with their cognitive and behavioral framework. This helps them form more consistent and compatible images of the issues, ideas, or personalities imposed by the media, since the contradiction between what the individual learns during socialization and what he is exposed to through the media may lead to a state of cognitive dissonance in which he must return to a state of balance by adopting one of the two contradictory positions.

In addition to the foregoing, many guidance tools help parents interact consciously with the media:

Organizing Time

This is one of the most important means of guidance. Hours upon hours should not be wasted watching television and satellite channels; rather, an agreement should be reached to set a specific time for these activities, while ensuring that the child is persuaded that setting time limits is beneficial to his health and safety.

Organizing Place

It is important that these activities be practiced in an open place in the home, such as the family living room, and that the child not be allowed to practice them in isolation or in his private room.

Activating Family Participation

The child's exposure to these media provides an opportunity to engage family participation, such as playing video games, communicating through internet chat programs, and watching television together.³⁸

Selecting Content

This means determining which channels the child may watch after becoming familiar with their content, activating the device's protection systems, and avoiding content that poses a danger to the child. The child is a weak being, born innocent like a blank sheet prepared to receive and accept everything written on it without resistance or opposition, because he has no prior awareness, information, or previous experience. Childhood is the stage of mental, intellectual, and behavioral formation. What is implanted during childhood in terms of acquisitions, influences, and inputs remains deposited within the child throughout life, and the values, morals, and behaviors, whether negative or positive, that the child acquires remain associated with him. The media and modern technologies used by the child, such as satellite channels and the child's addiction to them, may constitute a real danger to the child's psyche, health, and future.

Media outlets, including television, engage in feeding children values, caring for them through continuous and comprehensive socialization, and producing strong negative effects on their

³⁸ Djenat Radjem, "The Importance of *Media Literacy Education* and the Extent of Parents' Awareness of It in the Family Environment," previously cited, 122.

psyches when they are exposed to these influences continuously and with great intensity and concentration.

Among these are the negative effects that influence children because of exposure to violent and sexually provocative content, as well as the behavioral and familial effects on the child and the family resulting from addiction to following satellite channels. Addiction to violence also kills the child's sensitivity toward victims of violence and his feeling for their suffering. Among the behavioral and familial effects of addiction to the media are the reduction of the relationship between the child and the family, and even the estrangement of each member of the family within his own private world, in addition to the elimination of many activities and practices that are important for the child's balanced development, such as real collective play, practicing sports, reading, and useful hobbies.

In addition, there is staying up late, changes in sleeping habits, becoming accustomed to unhealthy eating behaviors, exposure to academic failure, weak development of learning skills, declining educational achievement, the killing of the child's creative spirit, the draining of the child's intellectual energy, and the filling of his memory with everything negative and useless. It may also lead to children's rebellion and a tendency toward anger and violence when parents attempt to set limits and controls to rationalize the use of media and modern technology, or to some children resorting to them without their parents' knowledge or in defiance of them.

Leaving the child alone to confront the media, such as satellite channels, will have grave consequences for his mind, thoughts, self, and future. It is observed that the child left alone to face them is exposed to psychological disorder, spiritual anxiety, a constant feeling of fear, and a lack of security. In this situation, the child may reach a stage of loss and an inability to understand himself, determine his identity, and build his personality because of the many disturbed and contradictory influences surrounding him, among the family, the school, and satellite channels.³⁹

Encouraging Dialogue to Develop Critical Thinking

Family participation is very important for encouraging dialogue, raising questions, and searching for answers about what the child watches on screen, such as: "Do you think it is real?" What do you like about it? Why? When parents and siblings ask the child these questions, they prompt him to think about the content of television programs.

Providing Alternatives

This is done by encouraging the child to practice sports, group games, and constructive, intellectual games; guiding the child toward a useful hobby and supporting him with money, tools, and space; and directing the child toward a love of reading and the pleasure of self-learning. In this way, the child's time outside school is filled with useful, enjoyable, and positive activities, and he is not left alone in front of satellite channels.⁴⁰

³⁹ Fahd ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Shumaimri, *Media Literacy Education: How Do We Deal with the Media?* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd National Library for Publishing, 1st ed., 2010), 262.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

One of the roles of the family that assumes great importance, and one of its responsibilities in our present age, which is characterized by the massive flow of information, is to train children, beginning in the early years, to speak about the effects and dangers of the media, especially television programs. This continues through all stages of their development, so that when they become young people, they can criticize them, analyze their content, and then use them effectively, with maturity and intelligence, to communicate their ideas and aspirations. In this regard, Dr. Ihab Ramadan, a consultant in neurology and mental health, warned of the danger of television and its negative effects, saying: “The solution does not lie in staying away from television completely, but it must be according to a specific system, with continued encouragement of emotional and psychological communication among family members, a focus on teaching the child social values, and introducing him to right and wrong.”

This specific system can move the family into a state of investing in the television set, rather than being in a state of war or defeat, and not limiting itself to criticizing the content of television programs. Rather, it uses this content by transforming it into a tool that enriches the child’s faculty of criticism, ability to choose, skill in dialogue, and use of logic in judging things.

When using television, it must be taken into consideration that it is not a neutral object in the home, and that at the moment the screen is turned on, the viewer’s mind and feelings unite in a complex process to perceive, understand, and absorb what is being shown, especially in the case of the child. Parents who are concerned with raising their children must use this device to move the child from the state of the “victim” or the “defeated,” of which most families complain, to the position of the victor and investor in this tool, by educating them in media literacy and ensuring media literacy education.⁴¹

At the level of media literacy education, parents can impose restrictions and intervene in what children watch, including television programs and advertising messages. Parents can help their children make optimal use of the media by:

- Setting limits on media use, that is, determining how long the child remains in front of the screen.
- Establishing family guidelines for media content, that is, helping children and adolescents choose programs appropriate to their ages and interests, with particular emphasis on examining media content as a guiding role.
- Not hesitating with children regarding the rules for dealing with the media. If parents do not agree with their children’s choices, they should explain why. They should not place the television in bedrooms and should place it in a location where children’s use of it can be easily monitored.
- Using the media with children as a family activity and discussing with children what they see, hear, and read.

⁴¹ Arwa al-Ghalayini, “How Is Interaction with the Media Carried Out?,” Star Times Forums, October 23, 2014, accessed September 2, 2015, 10:00 p.m., www.startimes.com.

Sometimes children's skills in operating technological media exceed their parents' skills in operating a device or programming a satellite channel. Some parents, with kindness and good intentions, think that the harms of watching television and satellite channels are limited to eye strain or failure to complete school assignments.

For this reason, young family members must help their parents guide their younger brothers and sisters and care for them to protect them from the dangers of falling into the moral, criminal, intellectual, and behavioral pollution carried by some satellite channels in their content.

There are general rules that can be relied upon in guiding children toward conscious interaction with the media:

- Recognizing the existence of negative aspects in modern media and that not all their content is positive.
- Realizing the impossibility of preventing children's exposure to the media, whether directly or indirectly.
- The necessity of having a good role model for children, one who serves as an example to be emulated through their behavior in dealing consciously with the media.
- Building skills for conscious engagement with the media through three integrated aspects: the cognitive aspect (thinking), the affective aspect (feelings and emotions), and the behavioral aspect (practice and conduct).
- We must be certain that the child's joy springs from his depths without any deceptive electronic influences, glittering screens, complex electronic media, or artificial hysterical sounds.

Therefore, we must provide an atmosphere for our children to express their delicate feelings without affectation, and to enjoy life without fear, without provoking emotions, without instilling aggressive ideas, and without destroying the morals of sound, innate nature. Our children need genuine tenderness, feelings of fatherhood and brotherhood, and sensations of love that spring from the depths of the heart. For this reason, care must be taken to apply these ideas and to find new ones that can plant joy in children's souls and develop their abilities to prepare them for the future, rather than causing them to feel lost and neglected.⁴²

Conclusion

The media landscape has generally come to be characterized by a low standard and by the submission of media and cultural production to sensationalism and tedious routine, which leads the audience to adopt toward it a behavior dominated by a mixture of disgust and caution. This results in a sense of frustration and surrender, if not aversion and boycott. From this, we conclude that the sector's productions are positioned far from their original noble functions, not to mention their surrender to the logic of easy profit through their chaotic and disturbing use of television advertising. It is therefore necessary to adopt preventive or corrective programs based on media literacy education for the benefit of children and adolescents, to acquaint them with these media

⁴² Fahd ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Shumaimri, previously cited, 276.

and raise their awareness of the risks they pose. Media is a means and a culture that elevates the self through knowledge and openness to the world, and we cannot dispense with it in our modern world. If this is the case, its sound and useful use must be ensured.