

COMMERCIALS, WHO ARE THEY PERCEIVED BY, AND HOW?

A Comparison between target groups: children aged 7 to 12 and university students aged 19 to 24

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ABSTRACT

The impacts of commercials on different target groups have been matters of discussion for many years. In particular, how broadcast commercials are perceived and target opinions about them are of great importance to the advertiser. Significant differences between age groups are observed in the perception of advertising messages. For example, children perceive the realities about the service or product in a different way, as the level of perception and construing meaning are related to age. While adults derive clear meanings from commercial features regarding the sales promise, product features and reality, children remember mostly the sound and other distracting effects, the imaginary characters, the commercial jingle, the external appearance of the product and the slogan of the commercial.

Within the framework of this study a structural equation model method has been applied with primary school children in the age group 7-12 and university students in the age group 19-24. The objective of the study was to determine what these age groups saw in the commercials, what they were influenced by, which features they were attracted by and what they understood of the commercial messages. A further objective of the study was to bring out the differences between these two groups. A target of the research was to investigate the factors impacting the children's and young people's process of construing a meaning from TV commercials.

Key words: Advertising, Advertising Attitude, Advertising Value, Age Groups.

INTRODUCTION

It is of great importance to understand the attitudes of consumers to advertising from the standpoint of the value of the advertisement in the eyes of the consumer and the attitudes and behavior which are developed towards the brand. It is well-known that an advertisement performs not only the function of establishing communication with the consumer, but in this age of information and communication, it also plays an important role as a socio-cultural phenomenon for the effects it produces on the life of the society. An advertisement, when viewed as a means of communication, has such functions as informing, reminding, persuading, and adding value to a brand. The information-giving function of an advertisement aims to make consumers aware of new products, to enlighten them on the features and advantages of a particular product, to help to educate them and often to create a primary demand. The persuasive function of advertising, while working to create a selective demand, develop brand preference, and affect and even change consumer

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perceptions, also serves to reinforce the functions of reminding and persuading. The reminding function aims to establish effective communication with the target audience by reminding them of their positive impressions of the adopted brand.

The most important factor in the effectiveness of an advertisement which supports the sale of a product or other marketing communication functions can be seen as how the message purveyed to the target audience is perceived, and the attitudes of the consumer. In the most general understanding, an attitude is how people evaluate objects and events, including themselves. Attitudes show great durability over time. As well as being generic, from time to time they can develop in response to a particular product, person or event. In this respect, attitudes towards advertisements, the personal experiences of consumers of a brand or an organization and the level of satisfaction created by their experiences, sensations of the environment, the meanings which customers derive from advertisements and other marketing activities of the brand will cause the formation of a thought, feeling or belief towards a brand (Elden, 2009: pp. 415-416). In this regard, it can be said that attitudes to advertisements show variation between one target group watching the advertisement and another. Therefore, it is considered in the advertising sector that consumer attitudes have a great effect on the effectiveness of advertisements, their attitudes to brands and their purchasing tendencies. One of the most comprehensive conceptualizations on this topic was made by Lutz (1958). Lutz maintained that there were five priorities in attitudes to advertising: credibility of the advertisement, perception of the advertisement, attitude to the advertiser, general attitude to advertising, and psychological state (Durvasula et al., 1993, p. 627). From this it can be said that all the factors determining consumer behavior play a key role in determining their attitude to advertising.

One of the most important factors determining consumer behavior is age and age group, and this differentiates consumer reactions. As well as having its own characteristics, each age group also has its own priorities and values, and it is according to these that individuals make their choices in their lives. For this reason it is important for the advertising sector to understand generational differences so that its campaign strategies reach the right target audience, and for brand orientation decisions. Recently, the marketing and advertising sector has seen children as the consumers of the future and as a very useful market. Looked at from the point of view of purchasing, children today have their own budget and have a large effect on their families' purchasing decisions, and even can be seen to be the decision maker in certain purchases. For this reason, this study examined primary school children in the 7-12-year age group, who are the consumers of the future, and university students in the 18-24-year age group, with their still limited material freedom, and compared the effects on attitude to advertisements of the characteristics of informativeness, entertainment, irritation and deceptiveness of the advertisements by making an analysis separately for each age group. The research section of the work was based on structural equation modeling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Attitudes to Advertising in Mainstream and Children's and Young People's Markets

As activity in the children's and young people's market grows in the advertising sector, so studies of the content of this advertising and its effects also increase in number. Historically, the relationship between children and advertising was already in evidence in the 1920s, and advertisements directed at children and the effects of advertising on children have been the subject of discussion for many years. The focus of the discussion is the positive and negative effects created by advertising, but there have also been studies on children's development level and their understanding of advertising. Looking at the advertisements broadcast, it is seen that in the early years products for children such as sweets, breakfast cereals and toys were advertised, whereas now advertisements are produced for a wide range of luxury consumer items like cameras, watches, tablet computers and cellphones. Research on advertisements in the children's and young people's

market shows that babies as young as six months are exposed to advertising content, and that they begin to recognize brand logos; by the time they reach the age of three, some children have been seen to want to choose products on the basis of brands. When a child reaches the age of ten, it may have learned around 400 brand names.

Brand loyalty is very important for large firms. Each potential consumer is worth a hundred thousand dollars to these companies. Today, advertisers are investing over two billion dollars each year in advertising to children. This amount has grown by a factor of about twenty compared with ten years ago (Engin, 2013: p. 218).

In Turkey, the children's and young people's market is seen as an area of great importance by the advertising sector. It is well known that Turkey has a young population compared to the EU. According to the most recently published report of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) in 2013 (*İstatistiklerle Çocuk – Statistics and the Child, 2013*), there were 22 692 174 children in Turkey at the end of 2012. It is estimated that the proportion of children in the population will be 25.7% in 2023, and will fall to 19.1% in 2050 and 17.6% in 2075. Considering age groups, it can be seen that last year 27.3% of the child population were in the 0-4 year age group, 27.1% in the 5-9 year age group, 28.6% in the 10-14 year age group, and 16.9% were in the 15-17 year age group. These proportions show important variations on both an age and a gender basis, and as can be seen in the TÜİK report, children in Turkey form an important demographic population. These figures show that the children's and young people's market in Turkey is seen as a profitable area by brands and advertisers, and activity in this area is increasing day by day. In the world as a whole also, children and young people are treated seriously by the advertising sector in spite of not having their own budget, because they have a say in purchases both for their own use and for that of their families.

In a study of children's attitudes to advertisements, the reasons why children were chosen by the marketing and advertising sector as a target population were classified under three headings (Noor, A. Ghani & M. Zain 2004, p. 41):

1. Children as a primary market: The number of products which children can obtain to satisfy their own needs is increasing, and children are expected to be consumers. They can make their own purchasing choices in products in this group.
2. Children as an influence market: Children directly or indirectly influence other people such as their parents in their purchasing decisions.
3. Children as a future market: It is thought that when individuals are captured in their childhood as consumers, they will continue to follow the same product or brand when they grow up, and will in the future create a big market with the creation of brand loyalty.

Among the factors that must be taken into account in the advertising sector understands the attitudes to advertising of the children's and young people's market. Clearly, the age range in this market is very wide and there is great variation in physical and mental development. If the differences in individual development are taken into account, the effectiveness of advertising in this market will increase. Perception and evaluation of the message by children and young people will vary according to their age.

Roedder John (1999) proposed a model for characterizing children's responses to advertising that is based on Piagetian models of general development. According to this model, it is possible to distinguish a perceptual stage (3 to 7-year-olds), an analytical stage (7 to 11-year-olds) and a reflective stage (11 to 16-years-olds) in the understanding of media content. Children discriminate advertising from programs based on persuasive intent only from the age of 7-8 (i.e. from the beginning of the analytic stage). During the analytical stage children may recognize that commercials are intended to sell, but may not realize that they are biased messages. Children at this

age may understand that advertising does not always tell the truth and are more likely to express skeptical views toward the institution of advertising (Moore & Lutz, 2000). The emergence of this attitude is chiefly the result of the development of cognitive capacity rather than a consequence of the experience of watching television advertising (D'Alessio, Laghi & Baiocco, 2009, p. 409).

As a result, children perceive the realities about the service or product in different ways, since the level of perception and construing of meaning are related to age. While adults derive clear meanings from commercial features regarding the sales promise, product features and reality, children remember mostly the sound and other distracting effects, the imaginary characters, the commercial jingle, the external appearance of the product and the slogan of the commercial. Accordingly, the views of Piaget, in line with the Cognitive Developmental Theory, account for the fact that children have differences in perception and learning in different age groups. Especially, as the sensor motor thinking ability of children aged 7-12 develops, they perceive the commercial and construe a meaning out of it as well as understanding its purpose.

2. Advertising Value and Indicators of Advertising Value

Advertising value is formed according to the attitudes developed to the advertisement or even to the product or brand which is advertised. Each individual has different behavioral characteristics according to his or her nature. Attitudes are formed to a large extent according to the behavioral characteristics of individuals. In this regard, Robert H. Ducoffe has defined advertising value as “subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers”.

Attitudes to an advertisement can to a large extent influence attitudes to a brand, and such characteristics of the advertisement as informativeness, entertainment, deceptiveness and irritation affect attitudes to the advertisement. In this way, individuals make their purchasing decisions in connection with these effects. Thus, advertisers take note of the qualities of informativeness, entertainment, deceptiveness and irritation as seen by the target population of the advertisement. As explained above, the characteristics of the target population can determine the direction of their attitudes to the advertisement. One factor determining target population behavior is age and age group, which are important in forming attitudes to advertisements. As explained in other sections of this study, the capacity of individuals to perceive the messages directed towards them varies according to their age group, and attitudes to the advertisement and thus the advertising value are affected in line with the information which the individual acquires.

The characteristics of an advertisement which define attitude to an advertisement in the scope of this study were defined by Çakır & Çakır. These definitions are summarized as follows.

Informativeness: To make a decision, an advertisement must be informative for consumers. According to Aaker and Norris, informative advertisements are persuasive, attractive and effective.

Deceptiveness: In the case of advertising ethics, deceptiveness in advertisements is important. In the case of deceptiveness, consumers take advertisements with a pinch of salt and the reliability of the advertisement decreases. Also the cogency of the advertisement is reduced.

Entertainment: The property of amusingness of an advertisement makes it stand out among thousands of advertisement messages. Aaker and Norris (1982: 61) stated that there is a positive correlation between informativeness and entertainment. Ducoffe, in an article entitled “How Consumers Assess the Value of Advertising”, maintained that advertisements must have informative statements which are entertaining to attract the attention of consumers. Thus, both content and form make advertisements valuable.

Irritation: Aaker and Norris (1982: 61 – 62) stated that there is a negative correlation between the deceptiveness and the informativeness of an advertisement. In this context the easiest way to eliminate the advertisement’s deceptiveness feature is to enhance its informativeness.”

The four basic characteristics of advertisements as listed above are of great importance in the formation of consumer attitudes to advertisements. Advertisers take note of these four characteristics and build up their message content in a way that consumers form a positive attitude to the advertisement message. However, as mentioned above, the development characteristics of an individual affect perception of the message. The perception and understanding of an advertisement by children develops with age. In early childhood, children usually watch advertisements because they enjoy them, and they do not show a defensive attitude against the commercial messages given in the advertisement. As their understanding of the advertisement increases with age, they perceive that the messages in the advertisement are commercial, and some may stop watching some advertisements because they do not like this. In this way, attitudes to advertisements are formed. For example, a study in the USA indicated that by the time children reach the age of eight, they are usually able to understand to some extent advertising’s persuasive intent and to recognize the existence of deception in some advertisements. Children aged eight and older no longer believe that “commercials always tell the truth”. Beliefs about the truthfulness of advertising become even more negative as children move into adolescence (Kara Chan, 2001, p. 76).

In particular it was seen that children in the 6-9 year age group said that what advertisements said was true, but 19-year-olds said that advertisements were neither true nor convincing. Skepticism or suspicion of television advertisements increases with age. Young children are more interested in the images in the advertisement than in whether it is true or not, but when they get older they make decisions according to the content of the advertisement and what the message promises (Kara Chan & James McMeal 2002, p. 75). For this reason, this study was configured with the idea that both age groups would differentiate getting the information in an advertising message, evaluation, and the entertainment characteristic of an advertisement from its quality of deceptiveness according to their intellectual development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding the attitudes of consumers to advertisements and elucidating the basis of these attitudes can provide important data especially in the direction of creative studies. According to the advertising literature in Türkiye, there are fewer studies of attitudes towards advertisements than on other subjects. Therefore, this study was aimed at revealing the attitudes towards advertisements of different age groups in Türkiye. The aim of this study was to determine and evaluate students’ attitudes towards advertisements and to expose differences between two age groups. The study was carried out on the basis of both Robert H. Ducoffe’s article *“How Consumers Assess the Value of Advertising”*, which contains an advertising value scale developed for TV advertisements, and Çakır & Çakır’s *“The Relation of the Perceived Value of TV Advertisements and Advertisement Attitudes: a Structural Equation Model”*. The scale used in this study is based on Ducoffe’s article, and the Turkish version of the scale is based on Çakır & Çakır’s study. The sample group of this study is shown in Figure 1.

Age	N	%
7 - 12	275	60.4
19 - 24	180	39.6
Total	455	100.0
Gender		
Female	187	41.6
Male	263	58.4

Figure 1. Age and Gender Variables

60.4% of those participating in the study were between the ages of 7 and 12, and 39.6% were aged between 19 and 24.

41.6% of those participating were female and 58.4% were male.

The program used for this research was IBM SPSS AMOS 20. This program is useful for structural equation modeling. It is known that structural equation modeling is a very successful research method which gives the most correct results in research with multiple variables. In this study, we wanted to examine the knock-on effect of a large number of variables. The aim of the study was to set out the extent to which the variables affecting advertising value directly affected the attitude to an advertisement. By comparing at the final stage the models set up separately for each age group, the characteristics of each group were set out. Figure 2 shows the main hypothesis of the study and the model which is tested to determine the hypotheses. According to structural equation modeling, ways which are shown with one-way arrows between variables form the hypothesis of the research. According to this, the variables of informativeness, deceptiveness, entertainment and irritation affect the advertising value, the advertising variables and the advertising attitude.

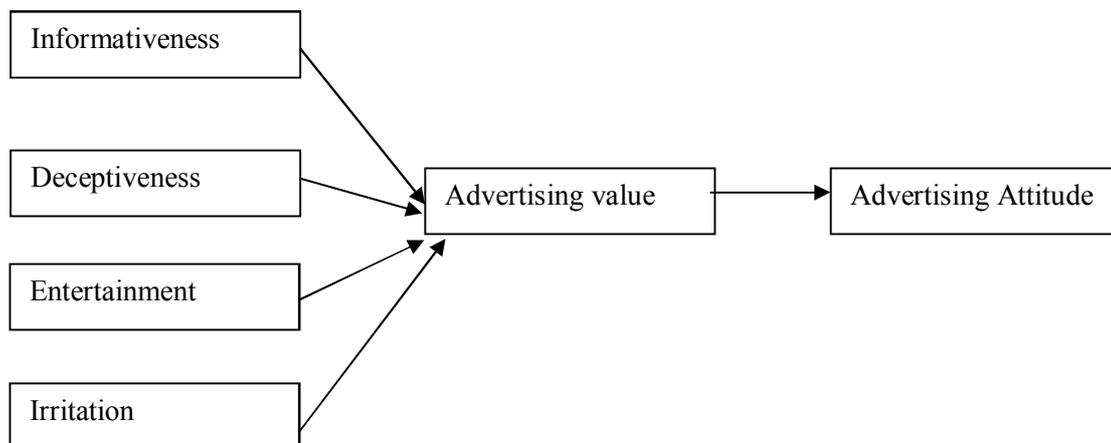
**Figure 2.** Proposed Model

Table 2 shows the scale items formed for each variable. Because the study was carried out in Turkey, the Turkish version of Çakır & Çakır of the scale developed by Ducoffe was used. However, as this paper is appearing in English, Table 1 shows the Ducoffe scale.

At the comparison stage, the developmental stage of each of the two groups was taken into account, and their perception and discrimination regarding the advertisements were discussed. Questionnaires with Likert-type scales prepared for the two age groups in the study, 7-12-year-old primary school students and 19-24-year-old university students, were applied. The questions posed in the study were prepared in the study carried out by Çakır & Çakır, and were evaluated under the structural equation model. A total of 472 data entries were made using 286 questionnaire forms for the 7-12 year age group and 186 for the 19-24 year age group. Distribution by gender, scale subdimension reliability (Cronbach's alpha), scale subdimension mean and standard deviation

information, and examination of discrimination of subdimension scores according to age group (ANOVA) were performed.

Advertising Value	Advertising is valuable
	Advertising is useful
	Advertising is important
Informativeness	Advertisements supply relevant information on products
	Advertising provides timely information on products
	Advertisements tell people about products when they need the information
Deceptiveness	Advertisements are deceptive
	Advertisements lie
	Important facts about products are left out of advertisements
Entertainment	Advertisements are entertaining
	Advertising is enjoyable
	Advertisements are pleasing
Irritation	Advertising is irritating
	Advertisements insult people's intelligence
	There is too much advertising

Figure 3. The scale items

RESULTS

The key parameters and fit indices for the measurement model are presented in Table 3.

Fit Indices	Measurement Model	Limitations
χ^2	200,008	n/a
Degress of Freedom	67	n/a
p	0,000	Non significant
χ^2/df	2,985	<3
GFI	,93	>,90
AGFI	,90	>,80
CFI	,92	>,90
RMSEA	,066	<,08
SRMR	,055	<,10

Figure 4. The key parameters and fit indices

According to CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis), it was seen that item S16 is undimensional for Irritation, and therefore this item was removed and analysis was repeated.

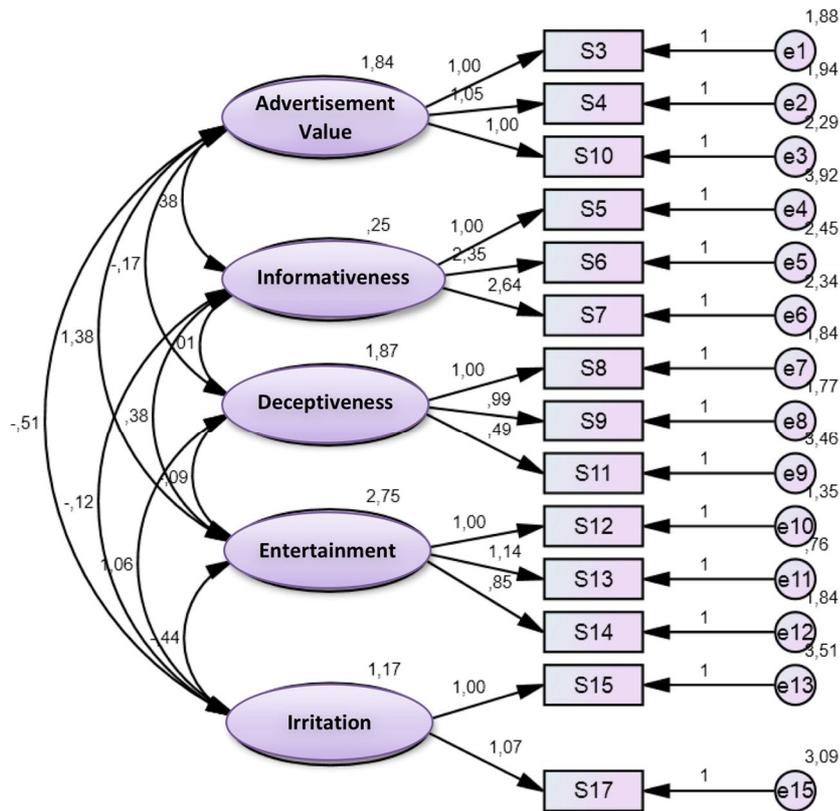


Figure 5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Model

According to CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis), it was seen that item S16 was undimensional for Irritation, and therefore this item were removed and analysis was repeated. (Figure 5)

The high AMOS indices for GFI, AGFI, the low RMSR, and the coefficient alpha reliability estimates indicate that the items combined in each scale are acceptable measures of each latent construct in the model. The effects of Informativeness, Deceptiveness, Entertainment and Irritation on advertising value for the two different age groups (7 - 12 and 19 - 24) were analyzed using the scores that were produced for the subdimensions.

The Structural Models for Each Target Group

According to the models which were developed for the two different age groups (7 – 12 and 19 – 24), deceptiveness, entertainment, informativeness and irritation had a significant effect.

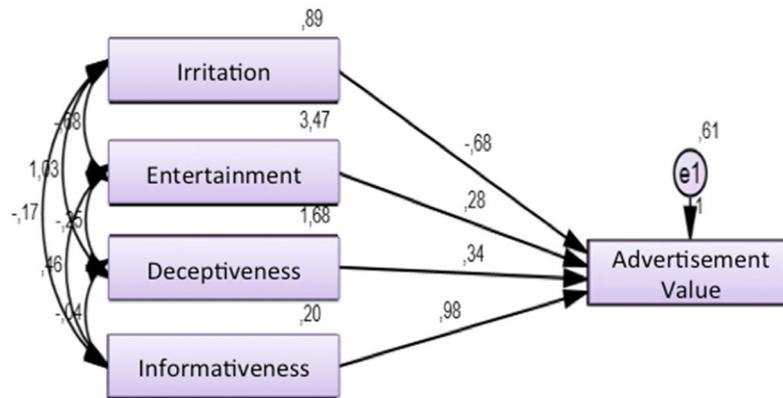


Figure 6. 7-12 Age Group Model

			Beta	t	p
Irritation	→	Advertisement Value	-0,684	-5,572	0,000**
Entertainment	→	Advertisement Value	0,279	8,737	0,000**
Deceptiveness	→	Advertisement Value	0,341	4,238	0,000**
Informativeness	→	Advertisement Value	0,984	6,836	0,000**

Figure 7. 7-12 Age Group

For the 7-12 age group:

- one unit increase of *irritation* makes advertising value decrease by 0.684 units
- one unit increase of *entertainment* makes advertising value increase by 0.279 units
- one unit increase of *deceptiveness* makes advertising value increase by 0.341 units
- one unit increase of *informativeness* makes advertising value increase by 0.984 units

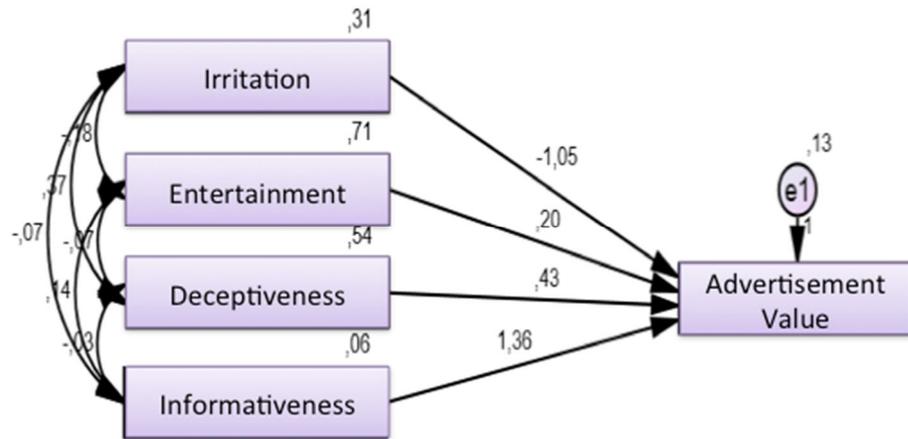


Figure 8. 19 – 24 Age Group Model

			Beta	t	p
Irritation	→	Advertisement Value	-1,047	-6,614	0,000**
Entertainment	→	Advertisement Value	,201	4,425	0,000**
Deceptiveness	→	Advertisement Value	,435	4,024	0,000**
Informativeness	→	Advertisement Value	1,357	8,171	0,000**

Figure 9. 19 – 24 Age Group

For 19 – 24 age group;

- one unit increase of *irritation* makes advertising value decrease by 1.047 units
- one unit increase of *entertainment* makes advertising value increase by 0.201 units
- one unit increase of *deceptiveness* makes advertising value increase by 0.435 units
- one unit increase of *informativeness* makes advertising value increase by 1.357 units.

CONCLUSION

When we compared two different age groups, the informativeness, deceptiveness, irritation and entertainment dimensions of advertisements had an effect on attitudes towards the advertisement. This confirms the literature about advertising value. Also, the dimensions of deceptiveness and informativeness had more impact on the 19 – 24 age group than on the other group. We can also say that this confirms Piaget's cognitive development theory, which maintains that data analyzing capacity increases with age. An individual's perception of an advertisement is differentiated by age group. In particular, children's selective attention develops with age. In our study the significant differentiation between the two age groups with regard to the dimensions of informativeness and irritation that because of children are in contradiction with advertisement content in specific ages.

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