

## **ATTITUDES OF YOUNG CONSUMERS TOWARDS PROMOTION BASED ON ADVERTISING**

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**Abstract.** Promotion and its various tools play a special role in marketing communication of enterprises with the child and teenage market. Young consumers perceive promotion first of all as actions, which bring them notable benefits in the form of the possible purchase of products at reduced prices or an opportunity to obtain free samples of goods or freebies.

**Key words:** young consumer, promotion, advertising

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the era of the buyer's market one of the key elements of success for an enterprise is to create an effective and efficient system of communication with current or potential buyers. Marketing communication is thus an integral element of the strategy of an enterprise and serves an important role in the realization of adopted market goals. It is even commonly said that enterprises operate thanks to the transfer of information and communication with the environment. Marketing communication may be defined as a set of pieces of information (signals), which a company emits from different sources towards not only its customers, but also other subjects of the marketing environment as well as a set of pieces of information, which a company collects from the market [Mruk 2004].

A changing and dynamic marketing environment, especially elements of the macro-environment and the immediate microenvironment of an enterprise, all result in a situation when classical promotional activities are not adequate any longer. They have to be replaced by integrated activities, referring to several different tools and channels of

communication, effectively managed and controlled in terms of the identification of communication recipients, the selection of communication tools, the amount and quality of information as well as the effects of this process.

Senders of marketing communications have to take into consideration several factors of the environment, especially those which pertain directly to the target audience. The communication should be adapted to the expectations of the audience, their system of values, perception of the world, opinions, habits, lifestyles, as well as the profile of the audience: demographic, socio-economic or psychographic. The bigger the common ground of experience is found for the sender and recipient of the communication, the more effective the promotional message will be. A major criterion in the profiling of the marketing communication may be the age of the target audience. The promotional message will be different when targeting children, teenagers or adults. Thus, it is advisable to divide the target audience further in terms of the age criterion, as different means and channels of communication, different forms and quality of the communication need to be used for children aged 1-6 years, different for schoolchildren, rebellious teenagers or "adult" young people.

A wide range of different promotion tools and media, exhibiting different characteristics, are used in the market of young consumers. Olejniczuk-Merta [2001] distinguishes four groups of promotion media, i.e.: visual (e.g. press, posters, brochures), acoustic (e.g. radio commercials), audiovisual (e.g. television) and others (e.g. fairs, exhibitions). An especially frequently used medium for promotional communications is television, which through commercials communicates the enterprise with the market. Advertising is an example of a tool of mass communication and it is most commonly defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and support for goods or services by a specific sender [Mruk 2004]. Advertising acts on three basic levels, i.e. it informs, convinces and enhances our notion of the advertised object. Its goal is also to transform interested people into customers and next transform new customers into regular customers.

Advertising or other tools of promotion, addressing children and teenagers should have specific features. One of the requirements is to be simple, reliable, objective and free from unnecessary exaggeration. However, in order for this most important information to be appropriately perceived by young people, advertising forms emphasize the value of the product, its unusual character, uniqueness and beauty. Visual forms are especially convincing in this segment of the market. The more frequently an image presents real people, phenomena and objects, the closer it is to the audience. It is also important for the people acting in advertising or commercials to be liked, accepted and admired. The emotional sphere of young people is very strongly affected by images in which specific gestures and facial expressions are used. For example landscapes from fairy tales, extra childlessness, smiling faces and an optimistic atmosphere give young viewers the feeling of affirmation of the world, the sense of security and peace of mind, so badly needed at this stage of their development [Olejniczuk-Merta 2001].

At present young consumers are treated by the participants in the market as "good investment into the future", thus enterprises spare no effort to communicate with the young audience as effectively as possible. In marketing practice a whole range of promotion tools are used, starting from all types of traditional advertising forms (television, radio, press commercials), posters, billboards or leaflets, through activities at fairs, exhibitions, different elements of sales promotion (freebies, samples of goods, loyalty

programs), and finally different unconventional promotion tools, such as e.g. advertising in the form of short messages, MMS, spam, event marketing, “whispering marketing” or guerrilla marketing. However, still the most common form of promotion in the young consumer market is advertising, primarily in the form of TV commercials.

Advertising and commercials inundating the world of young people bring about several negative effects. The most frequently mentioned aspects in this context include manipulating the audience, modelling their behaviour, provoking excessive needs, triggering aggression, consumer attitudes and changes in the value systems. Numerous studies also showed that different forms of advertising have a negative effect on physical development and cause undesirable changes in the emotional, cognitive and motivational spheres of their personalities [Wolska-Długosz 2006]. Moreover, they also contribute to the formation of a cognitive dissonance. They also cause disturbances in the psychomotor development of children and teenagers (e.g. the so-called television disease, faulty posture or vision defects).

This paper presents selected research results concerning attitudes of young consumers towards advertising.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Analyses of attitudes of young consumers towards advertising were based on empirical data collected using audience questionnaires. Investigations were conducted among 439 pupils of schools in the city of Poznań (primary and junior high schools). Units for the study (schools) were selected at random, in the further part of the study the layer sampling procedure was applied. Respondents were pupils present at school of the day of the survey. The survey was conducted in September and October 2006.

Data were analyzed using the tool of reverse tables and data base functions, while the results are presented in the form of selected indexes of structure and position measures.

In the sample structure pupils of classes IV-VI of primary schools accounted for 41%, while 59% were junior high school pupils (classes I-II). A total of 48% respondents were girls and 52% were boys. The share of individual age groups was as follows: 9-12 years – 57% and 13-15 years – 43%.

Almost 90% respondents declared they had their own pocket money. Over 50% of them received on average PLN 27 a week. Every tenth young respondent received on average PLN 50 a week. Young people disposed of their own funds for their individual needs, usually spending it on sweets and snacks, drinks, newspapers and magazines and cinema tickets.

## **RESULTS**

Results of investigations concerning selected aspects of attitudes of children and teenagers towards advertising are presented below.

### Attitudes of young consumers towards promotion of products

Young people encounter promotion of products very often. Although it is a common phenomenon, children and teenagers have some problems with an accurate interpretation of this concept. This study showed that almost 3/4 respondents (72%) declared that promotion for them is associated with a reduced price for products or with cheap products. Every tenth young participant of the market expressed an opinion that promotion for them is associated with a sale of products and freebies added to promoted goods. The other associations of respondents were rather spectacular, among them the most frequent denotations being advertising, bargains, super- and hypermarkets. Some negative opinions were also found among indicated options, saying that promotion is connected with shoddy products or low quality products. Thus it turns out that the narrow spectrum of indications shows that for the young audience promotion is rather unambiguous and they treat it first of all as an occasion to purchase products at lower prices. It seems understandable, due to the limited budget, which children and teenagers have at their disposal and which they may spend on their own purchases.

Responses given by children and teenagers were slightly different when they were asked to express their attitudes towards suggested descriptions connected with promotion. The biggest percentage of respondents showed their approval of the fact that promotion has an informative value, since it shows what products are worth buying (52%) or generally informs on products available on the market (42%) and on their attributes (Fig. 1). Over 85% young people agreed completely or agreed with a statement that in their case promotion is an incentive or a tempting encouragement to purchase a product. However, not all young people see positive values in promotion. As many as 1/3 respondents agreed with a statement that a promotion frequently results in a purchase of products, which later turn out to be useless.

The relatively highest percentage of respondents, i.e. as many as almost 40%, were not able to develop an explicit attitude towards a statement that promotion of products is equivalent to their high prices, related with the necessity on the part of the enterprise to compensate for the incurred marketing costs.

Young consumers are convinced of the considerable role of promotion in marketing communication of each enterprise, thus their negative attitude towards the fact that promotion of products is a waste of money, since good products sell well anyway. Such an attitude of disapproval of the above statement was expressed by every second respondent.

As far as young respondents had rather explicit associations with the word promotion, they showed extensive knowledge on this subject when asked about different manifestations and tools of promotion. However, this opinion on notable benefits in the form of an opportunity to buy a product at bargain prices was also mentioned here. For over 90% respondents the main form of promotion is connected with price promotions. An equally common form of promotion for children and teenagers was indicated as television commercials, advertising leaflets, posters or radio commercials and press advertising.

Apart from the form of media or the so-called paper advertising, the other form, in terms of the intensity of its application targeting young consumers, is sales promotion. For this reason a high percentage of respondents in this study – almost 25% – as a form of promotion indicated different tools of sales promotion, i.e. competitions, freebies,

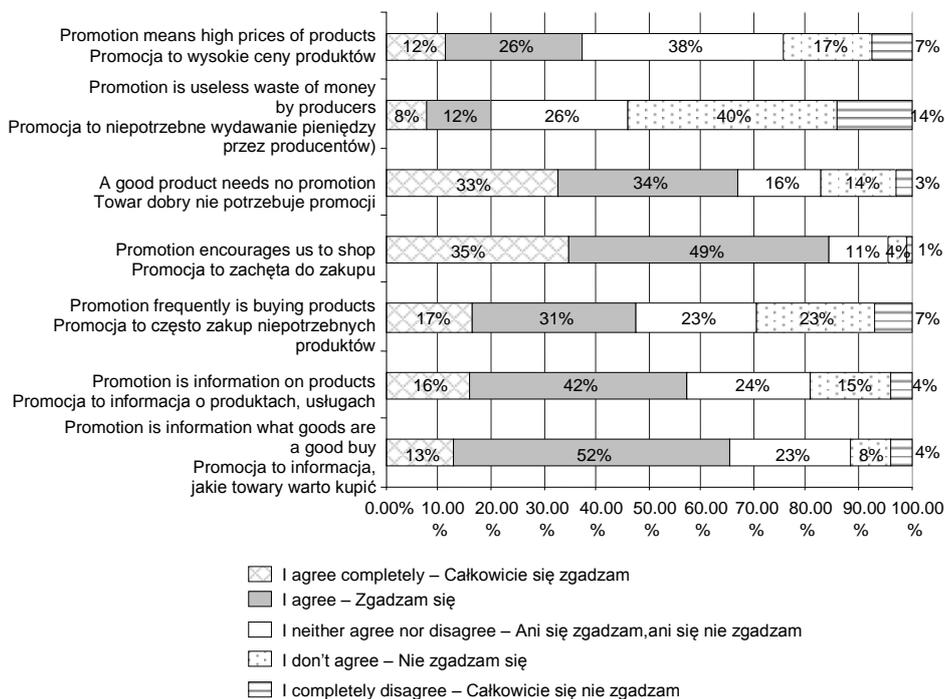


Fig. 1. Attitudes of young consumers towards promotion – a measure of attitudes in the Likert scale (on the base on the author's study, 2007)

Rys. 1. Postawy młodych konsumentów wobec promocji – pomiar postaw w skali Likerta (na podstawie badań własnych, przeprowadzonych w 2007 roku)

tastings, samples of goods and loyalty programs. Every tenth respondent mentioned billboards and sponsoring different events addressed to children and teenagers. In the declarations of young consumers there were also such manifestations of promotion mentioned as Internet advertising, people working in advertising, presentations of products or information passed on by other users of products.

As studies show, young participants in the market are able to mention many different manifestations of promotion. This may be connected with one essential feature of promotion towards this dynamically reacting segment of the market, i.e. the necessity to frequently change these instruments. New forms of marketing communication keep appearing continuously so as not to stress too strongly short-sighted benefits connected with the purchase of specific goods which are being promoted. Young people, naturally keen observers and participants of the market, remember much from the promotion scenes targeting them.

### Television commercials as a tool of promotion in the market of young consumers

Contemporary children and teenagers live in a world dominated by mass communication. Senders of promotion communications use different types of media in order to

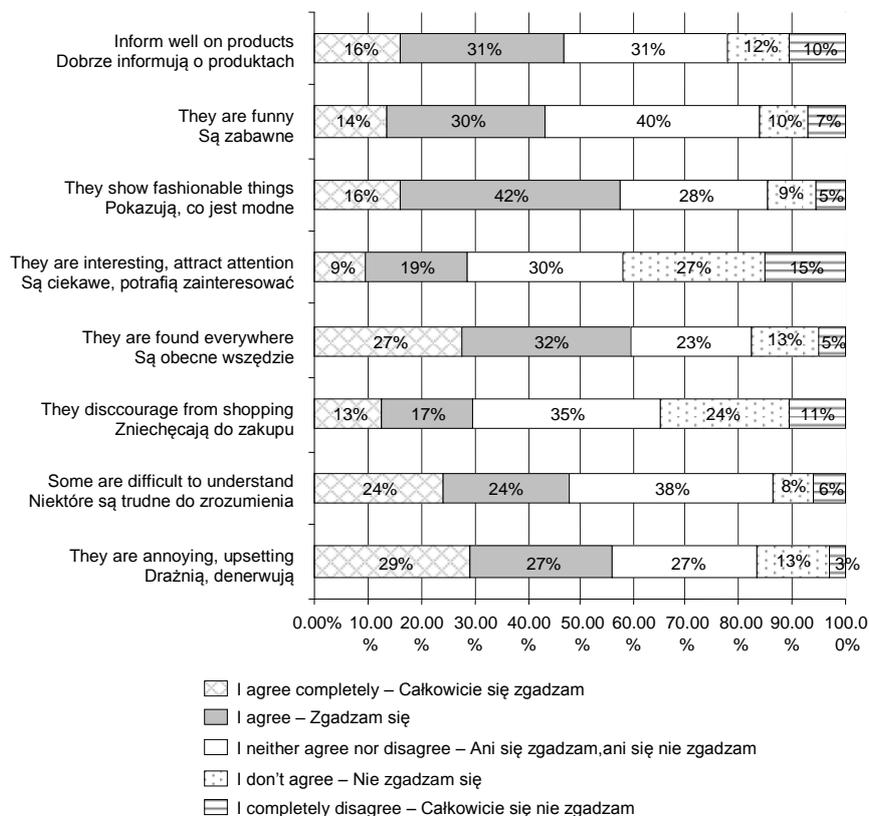


Fig. 2. Attitudes of young consumers towards television commercials – measure of attitudes in the Likert scale (on the base of the author's study, 2007)

Rys. 2. Postawy młodych konsumentów wobec reklam telewizyjnych – pomiar w skali Likerta (na podstawie badań własnych, przeprowadzonych w 2007 roku)

reach present or potential targets. The dominant role of the tool of transfer of information on the market targeting children and teenagers is played by television. Numerous studies show that young people spend a lot of time watching television. Statistically a schoolchild watches television on average for 30 h a week, treating it as an attractive and pleasant free time activity. Approximately 30% of this time is spent watching television commercials. Children, especially younger, watch them willingly, during commercial breaks in programs, treating them as interesting television broadcast, ranked second, immediately after cartoons [Kossowski 1999].

These investigations showed that over 90% respondents watch commercials very frequently, i.e. every day or several times a day and several times a week. Young people usually watch commercials in the afternoon or evening, after school, treating this activity as one of the pleasant leisure activities in free time with no organized activities or chores.

Opinions of young people towards advertising are highly varied, starting from positive ones to those definitely negative. Over 1/2 respondents agreed that commercials are

annoying. Every second respondent agreed or agreed completely with the statement that commercials are not always easy to understand for them and they are unable to identify their main message. Over 50% children and teenagers participating in the survey agreed that commercials and adverts show what is fashionable, what to eat, drink, wear and how to spend free time.

A similar percentage of young people also accepted the informative value of advertising, stressing the fact that it carries much important information on products and their value. Obviously, young people encounter advertising everywhere, it is ever present, which was confirmed by every second respondent.

Young participants of the market were not able to give definite opinions to all suggested statements on television commercials. Over 40% respondents were indifferent to the statements that television commercials may effectively discourage from purchasing a product or the statement that they are funny, amusing and entertaining. Relatively the biggest numbers of young people – every third respondent – had a negative attitude towards statements that commercials may attract interest and are interesting and that they may discourage rather than motivate to purchase.

Television commercials affect viewers with their images and sound. Depending on the age of targeted audience, the degree of selectivity of perception and criticism towards commercials vary. Pre-school children generally are not capable of differentiating commercials from other programs or cartoons. Criticism towards advertising starts to appear – in the opinion of psychologists – as late as the age of 8 years. Thus the most interesting audience for advertisers is the group between 6 and 10 years of age. This group is targeted with high intensity with children commercials as well as those which target adults. Young consumers have different criteria, according to which they accept commercials. They consider the most important aspects to be the atmosphere in the commercials, the peace and quiet, joy, cheerfulness and the world of fairy tales. Another discriminator of acceptance of advertising is connected with characters found in commercials. For younger viewers the most important are favourite characters from fairy tales and cartoons, while for older children they are their idols from the world of film, music as well as their peers. It is important for the characters found in commercials to be liked, admired and accepted. Analyzed respondents aged 9-15 years in commercials watch most willingly their peers, promoting specific models of behaviour, free time activities and lifestyles (72% mentioned responses). Every third young respondent said that they liked to have characters from fairy tales to be present in commercials and every fifth when there are adults there.

Young people, whose cultural environment is increasingly “littered” by ever-present advertising, by actively participating in the market, learn appropriate behaviour more and more frequently and thus they develop characteristic attitudes. Different aspects of rationality may be seen in them, manifested e.g. by the selective perception of advertising communication. Almost 3/4 respondents declared that they are able to distinguish the real from fiction in advertising. Not all respondents mindlessly follow advertising, treating it as a determinant of their market decisions. As many as 60% respondents declared that usually they do not buy products which are objects of advertising, in which their attributes, value and attractiveness are shown. Another aspect, which may indicate more rational rather than emotional attitudes towards advertising, is the fact that information on advertised products is verified or confirmed additionally in other sources. Almost 50% investigated children and teenagers usually confirm information

on values of advertised products by looking at their labels or packaging, or by asking sales personnel. Almost every third young respondent additionally looks for information in the Internet or by asking their parents, while every fourth – asks other users of advertised products.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The considerations presented above made it possible to formulate several conclusions.

1. In the process of marketing communication of an enterprise with the market, targeting children and teenagers, promotion and its various tools play a special role.

2. Young consumers perceive promotion first of all as activities, which bring notable benefits in the form of the possibility to purchase products at reduced prices or to obtain free samples of goods or freebies.

3. Among many tools of promotion targeting the child and teenage segment of the market, advertising plays a special role, especially television commercials, as a very popular and intensively utilized means to influence the buyer.

4. Despite the commonly admitted harmfulness of advertising, especially television commercials, targeting the young audience, potential benefits may be found more and more often, resulting e.g. from the informative and educational functions as a form of development of consumer skills, collected knowledge on the market or insight into economic phenomena, which in the future may facilitate the adequate decision-making process.

5. Increasing activity of young people, manifested in the participation in the market and its insightful observation result in the formation of more rational attitudes towards advertising, as it may be evidenced by their selective perception, varying rates of acceptance or having the information contained in advertising additionally confirmed in other sources.

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## POSTAWY MŁODYCH KONSUMENTÓW WOBEC PROMOCJI NA PRZYKŁADZIE REKLAM

**Streszczenie.** Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań dotyczących wybranych aspektów komunikacji marketingowej oraz różnych narzędzi promocji, zwłaszcza reklamy telewizyjnej, na rynku młodych konsumentów. Stwierdzono m.in., iż dzieci i młodzież mało

precyzyjnie potrafią określić słowo promocja, natomiast posiadają szeroką wiedzę odnośnie różnych przejawów i narzędzi promocji. Zazwyczaj wskazują na te formy, które przynoszą im wymierne korzyści w postaci niższej ceny zakupu czy różnych narzędzi promocji sprzedaży. Powszechność i masowość reklam powoduje, iż młodzi ludzie zaczynają je traktować wybiórczo, mają różne kryteria ich akceptacji, potrafią wskazać, co jest w nich dobre, a co złe oraz przestają im wierzyć bezgranicznie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młody konsument, promocja, reklama

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