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Article

The attitude of children and parents towards children influencers

Journal of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in Emerging Markets (JMCBEM)

Provided in Cooperation with:
Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw

Suggested Citation: Kołaszewska, Izabela; Kacprzak, Agnieszka (2022) : The attitude of children and parents towards children influencers, Journal of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in Emerging Markets (JMCBEM), ISSN 2449-6634, University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management, Warsaw, Iss. 2, pp. 4-23,
https://doi.org/10.7172/2449-6634.jmcbem.2022.2.1

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/311528

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The Attitude of Children and Parents Towards Children Influencers

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Received: 19 January 2022/ Revised: 2 April 2022/ Accepted: 15 April 2022/ Published online: 13 June 2022

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of internet influencers is among the most discussed issues in marketing to children. The amount of time children spend on the internet increases every year, which increases the risk of becoming the target of influencer marketing. Studying the impact of influencers on children is of great importance not only for marketers, but also for parents responsible for upbringing their offspring. This article presents the results of a qualitative study aimed at describing three components of the attitude (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) of children and parents towards children influencers. The methods employed in this study are focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews with 18 participants: children aged 8–11 and their parents. During the interviews, one sample YouTube video and two TikTok children influencer videos were presented. The analysis of cognitive aspects of attitude showed that children have a higher level of awareness of product placement in influencer video than their parents suspect. Many parents declare that they are against such content on social media, while children see nothing wrong with promotional content and believe that it is natural. As far as the emotional aspect of attitude is concerned, parents present a wider range of emotions than children, possibly because they are less familiar with such content. Being exposed to product placement in influencer videos also impacts the behavioural aspect of attitude. Children are eager to have the promoted products, but parents are sceptical about such products and declare that they buy them only for special occasions.

JEL classification: M31, M37

Keywords: Children influencers, consumer behaviour, tripartite model of attitude, product placement, YouTube, TikTok

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, consumers tend to shift more and more of their activity to the internet. In the virtual world, they make purchases, talk to friends (with whom they might have never had contact in real life), enjoy entertainment, work, and pursue their passions. As a consequence, marketers face the challenge of adapting marketing tools to be effective in the virtual world. A large portion

DOI: 10.7172/2449-6634.jmcbem.2022.2.1

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of marketing communication has been moved to social media. Official profiles are created, and the main goal of them is to gather a group of loyal recipients who, if necessary, would become brand advocates. Paid promotion is also present in the social media content of celebrities and influencers, usually in the form of product placement. On all social media platforms, we can observe a new phenomenon in the form of children influencers. What may seem to be at first glance an innocent video presenting other children playing might as well be a form of hidden promotion in the form of product placement directed to the young audience. Owing to the novelty of this issue, research on this subject is scarce (de Veirman et al., 2019). To deepen the existing knowledge on influencer marketing directed to children, this study will focus on the attitude of both children and parents towards children influencers. Based on the three-component attitude theory (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), the detailed research questions are related to cognitive, emotional and behavioural attitude of children and parents towards children influencers:

– What do children and parents think of children influencers?
– What do children and parents feel about children influencers?
– How do children and parents act as a result of being exposed to children influencers?

This paper has been divided into the following parts: a literature review which shows the state of knowledge on influencers' marketing directed to children; a data and methods section; the presentation of research results; discussion and conclusions for theory and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Media and Influencer Marketing

Kotler (2000, p. 4) defines marketing as *'a social process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products and services of value freely with others'* As the world is constantly changing and each decade brings new technological solutions, or previously absent customer needs and desires, marketers need to keep track of the market and update their activities accordingly (Kotler, 1999, p. 2).

Today, we live in a digital age where the internet is an integral part of life for most of society. In 2020, 98% of Polish people aged 18–24 declared that they used the internet at least once a week and 100% of them connected wirelessly. As the age of consumers increases, the willingness to use the internet decreases, but still the vast majority of Poles are active on the internet (CBOS, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019 has led us to spend even more time on the internet, both for business and private purposes (KRD, 2020). Not only adults but also children were forced to spend a lot of time on the internet due to online learning. Many of them also increased their screen time after school, as many parents treated mobile devices as babysitters that would help them reconcile working from home with taking care of children. According to Pew Internet (2021), 72% of parents declare that their children spend more time on the internet than before the pandemic outbreak. A large part of their screen time is connected to social media. Most children like to watch content on social networks, among which the most popular are Youtube and TikTok, which allow to watch short movies that are easy to understand and interesting even for toddlers. During the first year of the pandemic, children aged 4 to 15 spent on average 80 minutes a day on TikTok and 85 minutes a day on YouTube (Perez, 2020).

YouTube is the most popular free website for posting videos, reacting, and writing comments (Statista, 2021). The number of active users is over 2 billion and 500 hours of videos are published every minute (YouTube, 2021b). YouTube motivates its community members to create their own content by "sharing" the profits. The Google LLC, the owner of YouTube, allows creators to earn money on their films (Google Support, 2021). This phenomenon has led to the emergence of a new professional group of YouTubers – creators who professionally produce videos and make

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them available on the platform (McCullough, 2021). YouTube has also created its own types of ads that are quite specific, often in the form of short videos or a combination of graphics and text. Product placement (promoting products in videos in return for compensation from sponsors) is also very popular there (Veneo Performance, 2020; Google Support, 2021).

TikTok is an application dedicated mainly to mobile devices, enabling the publication of short films (not longer than 60 seconds) with the use of music selected from a vast database. Designed practically only for entertainment, it is exceptionally easy to use. Due to these features, it has become popular among children, teenagers, and young adults around the world (Pallus, 2019). TikTok experiences constant growth and is currently available in 141 countries. Around the world, 689 million people use TikTok per month, not including Chinese users, because the application has a different name there (Douyin). According to Kennedy (2020), the significant increase in TikTok popularity could be due to the coronavirus pandemic, as the lockdown forced people to spend most of their time at home. Such circumstances made them feel bored and discouraged. TikTok videos, which are usually exaggerated and funny, have become a kind of antidote to these bad moods and the most popular entertainment for teenagers.

Social media contributed to the creation of a social group called "influencers". This term is used to describe *'a person or thing that influences someone / something, especially a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by recommending it on social media'* (Oxford Dictionary, n.d). Influencers work with brands and, in return for remuneration, create and publish content recommending products and services. Influencer marketing is one of the word-of-mouth marketing strategies and can be defined as "identifying and targeting influential users and stimulate them to endorse a brand or specific products through their social media activities" (de Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing occurs especially in the beauty, clothing, and lifestyle industries, but is not limited to these industries (Glucksman, 2017). Money is not the only type of reward that influencers can obtain. Some brands prefer to send creators their products for free in exchange for showing them on social media and issuing a positive opinion (de Veirman et al., 2019).

The audience of influencer marketing are not only adults, but also children. They spend a lot of time on the internet watching their favourite YouTubers and Tiktokers. Many of these creators are also underage. The number of children who are social media stars and have a large number of followers is also growing. For example, the most popular child influencer on Youtube, Ryan Kaji, has more than 30 million followers, and each of his movies achieves millions of views (YouTube, 2021a). Needless to say, his success, just as other juvenile influencers, is based on adults who plan, organize, coordinate, and control the filmmaking process. They also sign contracts with organizations that offer them remuneration in return for placing advertisements in their children's films. Such activities have sparked much controversy (Veirman et al., 2019).

2.2. Influencer Marketing and Children

According to McGuire (1985, pp. 233–346), opinion leaders who are known, liked, or similar to the audience seem most attractive and, as a result, have the greatest impact on other consumers. Influencers might be called a new type of opinion leaders who, thanks to the internet, might reach a much bigger number of people than traditional, pre-internet opinion leaders. Nicoll and Nansen (2018) conducted a content analysis of 100 toys unboxing videos to compare the vlogs of children (53%) and adults (47%) in terms of expertise, professionalism, and promotion. Boys (52%) mostly unboxed and played with toy cars and Legos, while girls (36%) most often unpacked toys such as Shopkins (tiny collectible figurines). Children's vlogs turned out to be more diverse and natural than professional or adult videos, despite the tendency to mimic their production and branding strategies. Furthermore, famous professional channels tend to create an impression of amateurishness and authenticity in their videos, by showing playful children.

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Influencers are very important to producers as they place their ads in relevant and entertaining content. Influencers often do not disclose that the content they post on social media is commercial. For this reason, young audiences may find it difficult to critically evaluate such content. They may not perceive it as an advertisement but the influencer's good advice conveyed from genuine brand sympathy (Phelps et al., 2004; Cheung et al., 2009). Moreover, in this situation, a correspondence bias may appear, which consists in the tendency to explain human behaviour with internal causes and ignoring situational ones. Children have a particular tendency to display this bias, and as a result come to the conclusion that if an influencer did not like a brand, he or she would never agree to advertise it (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2003). In addition, children may have problems recognizing advertisements on the internet (Bijmolt, 1998).

Therefore, until the age of 7–8, children do not know the true purpose of advertising. In primary school, their logical thinking skills and understanding of processes develop, and only at the age of 11–12 are they able to fully comprehend the functions of advertising (Jasielska & Maksymiuk, 2010, pp. 32–34). This situation can have many negative consequences. Today, children are immersed in the digital world and have prolonged contact with the content of influencers. As a result, they are at risk of shaping a materialistic attitude, lowering their self-esteem, forced demand, conflicts with parents, unhealthy eating habits, feeling cheated, deprecating language, and perpetuating stereotypes (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2009; Starosta, 2012; Jasielska & Maksymiuk, 2010, pp. 102–113). Special attention should also be paid to the issue of using children as influencers by adults. Instead of enjoying the freedom to express themselves on the internet, these children often become a tool in the hands of corporations, used to influence the audience (Pedersen & Aspevig, 2018). Martínez and Olsson (2019), who conducted 12 focus groups with 46 children aged 9–12, show the importance of YouTubers as influencers and role models for children. Their group interviews were focused on makeup tutorials of a YouTube influencer called Misslisibell, which contain a lot of product placement. The conclusion of the study states that YouTubers have a great influence on the identity and consumption of adolescents. However, Marsh (2016), in his study of 4-year-old children, came to the opposite conclusion. He observed how preschoolers watch and react to YouTube videos. His study showed that these children enjoy the mere act of viewing, and influencers do not have an impact on their consumption. The contradictory results of this study might be connected to the young age of the study participants, so the hypothesis that the susceptibility to children influencers is related to the age of targeted children might be considered.

Several studies focused on the impact of influencers on children's eating habits. Coates (2019a) took a closer look at 380 videos posted on YouTube by influencers to find that only 27 of them did not contain food tips. Furthermore, the featured food was classified more often as unhealthy (49.4%) than healthy (34.5%). The analysis of the relationship between the frequency of watching vlogs by children and the consumption of unhealthy drinks and snacks was carried out by Smit et al. (2020). They found that the frequency of watching vlogs by children aged 8–12 increased their consumption of unhealthy food two years later. However, another study showed that the result of watching influencers could be immediate (Coates et al., 2019b). 176 children aged 9–11 were exposed to 2 mock Instagram profiles: the first promoted unhealthy food, and the second healthy. Although the latter did not have any impact on the viewers, the first immediately increased the consumption of unhealthy foods. Interestingly, in another study, the same researchers before showing the YouTube video alerted the group (151 children aged 9–11 years) about the advertisement included in it. As in the first study, exposure to influencer content featuring unhealthy food increased the consumption of unhealthy snacks. Interestingly, children who were aware of the promotion consumed 41% more of the advertised snack than children in the control group.

Studies focusing on the parents' perspective on the phenomenon of children influencers are scarce. Evans et al. (2018) examined 418 parents of young children in terms of understanding

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and reacting to sponsored child influencer unboxing videos. Researchers evaluated the influence of sponsorship text disclosure, pre-movie information, and parental mediation on conceptual persuasion knowledge, perceptions of sponsorship transparency, and different outcome measures. They found that sponsorship information did not affect parents' conceptual persuasion knowledge of the unboxing video. However, those parents who saw a video with a pre-roll sponsor ad reported a higher level of sponsorship transparency. Parental mediation also conditionally influenced the perception of transparency and attitudes toward the sponsor. Parental mediation refers to strategies parents teach their children to cope with media influence and minimize negative consequences (Jiow, Lim, & Lin, 2017). However, existing studies show that parental mediation of advertising has little or no influence on children's identification of product placement in videos (Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018), but can moderate their brand attitude (Naderer et al., 2018).

2.3. Tripartite Model of Attitude

Attitude can be defined as a "learned predisposition to respond in a consistent evaluative manner to an object or class of objects" (Ostrom, 1969). The evaluation is usually perceived as a continuum ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative and is the result of the learning process connected with the object. In the case of this study, the objects are children influencers. The evaluative response may be divided into three classes: cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). This structural model of attitude is also called the "ABC" tripartite model of attitudes (A-affect, B- behaviour, C-cognition).

The cognitive component of attitude is related to individual beliefs and knowledge about children influencers. These beliefs might not be objective or match the reality, but rather refer to how consumers perceived the object of evaluation. The emotional component refers to consumers' feelings about the object and the behavioural (or conative) component consists of a possible response to the object.

This structural approach is highly useful in consumer studies as it provides a framework to cover the attitude holistically: by discovering the believes towards an object, the nature of affect and behavioural intention (Evans, Jamal, & Foxal, 2006). In terms of children influencers, this approach is reflected in the three main research questions of this study, that is: what do the participants think and feel about children influencers and how do they intend to act as a result of being exposed to children influencers' marketing.

3. DATA AND METHODS

3.1. Research Procedure

The research method used in this study was qualitative interviews in the form of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group interviews (FGIs). The explorative qualitative field research enables us to understand in depth a topic that might otherwise be explored quite superficially (Gioia et al., 2013). In addition, the flexibility of this method allows us to modify the interview scenario in order to learn more about the topics that turned out to be extremely important to study participants (Babbie, 2009). In total, five IDIs and one FGI were conducted with children and two IDIs and three FGIs with parents. Two IDIs with children and two FGIs (one with four children and one with two parents) took place at the homes of the study participants, while the remaining ones were by teleconferences using the Zoom or Google Meet applications. The choice of the online or offline mode of conducting the study depended on the technical capabilities of the respondents and the existing restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, every effort was made to ensure that the comfort of the conversation was the same for all participants.

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The average interview time with children was 30 minutes and with parents 40 minutes. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then analysed. After the interview with children, a short presentation explaining product placement in a way appropriate for the age of the children was offered. It was a form of debriefing for the participants and an incentive for parents to agree for their offspring to participate in the study.

All collected data were analysed according to the procedure of inductive coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by two researchers. The main themes that were identified for children and parents related to each of the three dimensions of attitude are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

3.2. Research Tools

During the interviews, two separate interview scenarios were used. One of them was dedicated to children and the other to parents, as the language and manner of conducting the conversation were different in both cases. For example, questions to children were asked in a simple, understandable way, in a colloquial style and with the use of numerous simplifications, so that the interlocutors were able to answer them without causing unnecessary stress associated with a sense of confusion.

As far as the interview scenario for children is concerned, in the first step, participants were asked introductory questions on whether they used YouTube or have the TikTok app installed on their smartphone, what movies they watched most on these two platforms, and what YouTubers they knew. The last of warm-up questions were accompanied by the presentation of photos of children influencers with a request to identify those that children were familiar with.

The main questions were preceded by a five-minute fragment of a YouTube influencer movie. It depicts a situation where a mother enters her 10-year-old daughter's room during an online lesson. She complains that the girl's clothes are too modest and make her dress up in a more attractive outfit. After changing clothes, mom gives her daughter a few boxes – creative sets for creating bracelets, makeup kits, and a plastic heart opened with a key. The products and the logo of the store are presented. The girl plays with her mother and tests new gadgets on herself, her dad, and her younger brother, loudly and exaggeratingly admiring their properties. The questions asked after watching the video were related to the attitude of children towards the content they had watched. Then the children's attention was drawn to the products placed in the film and the issues of noticing the promotion and attitude towards it on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels.

In the next step, two TikTok influencer videos were presented to children. TikTok video 1[1] shows an amusing scene where the father is trying to work from home and gives his daughter a gift – a toy guitar, so that she would not be bored. The video features the box and the brand name. However, it turns out to be a loud toy and disturbs her father, so he gives her a second gift, a toy microphone, also displaying the logo. The girl begins to sing loudly, and the father raises his hands in despair because the child's singing is even more disruptive than playing the guitar. TikTok video 2[2] is a FunLockets diary presentation to the sounds of happy music. It is a view of women's hands that open all the lockers, drawers closed with a key, create tabs and present stickers included in the set.

The above-mentioned TikTok movies have been selected on the basis of the opposite – in the first, product placement is woven into the plot of the movie, and in the second, it is the only element of the video. Therefore, right after seeing them, the children were asked which one they liked more and why. Then questions about other dimensions of attitude towards the presented content were asked. The last part of the interview was related to other children influencers that interviewees were familiar with and their attitude towards them and their content.

[1] https://linkd.pl/p7dfm

[2] https://linkd.pl/p7dfp

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The introduction of the interview scenario directed to parents included questions on participants' experiences with YouTube and TikTok films aimed at children and their children's activities on the internet. Next, similar to the children's interview scenario, a set of children influencers' photos was presented to be recognized. The main questions concerned the same three videos that the children watched. After watching the first one, the study participants were asked about their general impressions: whether they would allow their child to watch such movies and whether their child actually watched them. Then the products placed in this film, the message that this video brings, and how it can affect the young audience were discussed. After seeing two TikTok movies, the interviewees were asked to speculate which one the kids liked more and why. The conversation then moved to product placement and its consequences. In the last part of the interview, parents were asked if they knew about other sponsored films on social media aimed at children and what their attitude towards such content and its creators was.

3.3. Research Sample

The study covered children aged 8–11 years who attended grades II–V of primary school and their parents. Parents participated in two individual in-depth interviews (two mothers) and three focus groups, one consisting of a mother and a father and one of three mothers of related children. The data collection was ceased at the point of reaching data saturation (Saunders et al., 2017). The detailed characteristics of the study participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Study participants – children aged 8–11

Interview number	Interlocutor's code	Gender	Age	School Grade
1	R 1	girl	10	III
2	R 2	girl	9	III
3	R 3	boy	10	III
4	R 4	boy	10	III
5	R 5	girl	11	V
6	R 6.1	boy	8	II
	R 6.2	boy	11	V
	R 6.3	boy	10	IV
	R 6.4	girl	8	II

Source: Own study.

Table 2
Study participants – parents of children aged 8–11

Interview number	Interlocutor's code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Children's gender and age
7	R 7.1	woman	35	teacher	girl (8) and boy (10)
	R 7.2	woman	36	costume designer	girl (9)
	R 7.3	woman	33	translator	girl (10)
8	R 8.1	man	55	computer specialist	girl (11)
	R 8.2	woman	45	counter	
9	R 9	woman	32	marketer	boy (11) and boy (8)
10	R 10	woman	40	nurse	boy (10)
11	R 11.1	man	50	professional driver	boy (10)
	R 11.2	woman	47	nurse	

Source: Own study.

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4. RESULTS

4.1. Cognitive Component of Attitude Towards Children Influencers

Surprisingly, the children who participated in the study are not uncritical about what they are watching. They do not like all the movies on YouTube and are not ashamed to express their opinions. They are also aware that these movies do not necessarily show the truth. Most of the kids noticed that in the first movie, both adults and children play roles. They also pointed out that the girl's reaction to the gifts is greatly exaggerated. Most young interviewees have no doubt that there are YouTubers who make films for fun and those who do it just for money.

"It's like… that I see some YouTubers making videos, because they like to and others, because they want to earn a lot of money. Because you can make money from it. I saw a video some time ago, where some people had a challenge to put on weight the fastest. And they were just going to McDonald's, but they were saying all the time that it's not McDonald's ad." (R3)

Children are aware of the importance of views, subscriptions, and likes under the videos. They understand the entire system of recording and watching films on this platform, because sometimes even influencers explain how these social networks work.

The interviews show that the children notice product placement in YouTube and TikTok videos. They also pay attention to what is in the movie. They see the products that are placed in the film, but not all children understand that it is a promotion in the strict sense of the word. However, all of them admitted that these videos are made "for something". After watching the YouTube video, some of the children were convinced that they had seen an advertisement for products and even tried to explain what such activities were about. The other part of the interviewees admitted that they did not know if it was an ad. The children also gave other responses, e.g. that it was a review or simply a gift that a mother gives her daughter.

Even without being sure whether it was an advertisement or not, the children could guess why the woman in the film presented the products. According to most of the kids, the creators of the video did this primarily for money and to increase the number of views, subscriptions, and likes. Furthermore, such activities were aimed at increasing the sale of products.

"I once watched on YouTube somebody advertising something and saying what he can do with this thing. For example, [creators] show a keyboard and say a name of a brand… And they say the brand, for example SteelSeries, this brand was last time, when I watched such a video. And they say: come there, because there are cool chairs and other stuff there. (…) [Sponsored video] means that simply somebody asks somebody else to make an ad in a video. And that person gives money for it." (R3)

"For those who own this store, it's okay, but for those who have to place the product on a video, it's not okay. Because they'll get money from it, but they must show how they use it and this counts as an advertisement." (R1)

The young interlocutors easily name many other examples of product placement they have seen on YouTube and TikTok, such as keyboards, chairs, headphones, computer mice, laptops, pens, clothes, gadgets, food, mugs, pillows, key rings, sweatshirts, bracelets, and toys.

"The most often, when I watched some videos, people were recommending gaming equipment, some headphones, laptops of some brand. For example, pens for cheating at school, clothes from their shops, and some gadgets. I think, that it's alright, but they shouldn't talk about it for 5 minutes straight, they should talk briefly. The entire video should not consist only of advertising." (R4)

"For example, when I watch a video where somebody is painting, they usually recommend some crayons or paints." (R5)

"Well, they don't say: This is great, buy it. They say: you have the link in a description box. (…) It's boring to me." (R2)

DOI: 10.7172/2449-6634.jmcbem.2022.2.1

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The children also pointed out that many influencers have their own store where they sell gadgets related to their channel to their fans. In their films, the creators very often display these products to encourage recipients to buy. My interlocutors see nothing wrong with such actions. They accept uncritically that this is just the way social media are constructed and do not reflect on it. If the advertisement is long, children declared that they were bothered or bored by it. However, they have nothing against short sponsored material woven into the plot of the film.

Among parents, mixed opinions on the presented content were observed. On the one hand, the videos were perceived as artificial, dishonest, and exaggerated. Lots of negative consequences of watching such content were enumerated, such as: exposing children to distorted family image and very traditional gender stereotypes. Many people have noticed that watching a mother walk around the house smartly dressed wearing high heels all the time and requiring nothing from her daughter except a nice appearance can have a detrimental effect on the audience. In addition, the scene of luring a girl away from online lessons to dress up, make jewellery together, and do makeup sparked outrage among many parents. They speculated that the child, after watching such a production, may start to blame his or her mother for not caring enough about him or her because she forces them to study and do homework instead of buying new toys.

"And another question is if the kid would be jealous of the super mum who doesn't require any homework, there is no discipline. She brings cool things and sits with her doing bracelets, she doesn't bother her by school, she just lets her fulfil her desires (...) The message of this video is that the parent is a cool buddy and in real life, in my opinion, it is impossible. (...) And here I saw a message that the mother ignores everything: school and everything, here only the appearance is important and a good presentation. But I believe that she does it only to make money. She sees some marketing purpose in it." (R14)

"By the way, this daddy has two left hands, because he can't cook anything (laugh). He prefers to wear makeup than to be hungry." (R 8.1)

"(...) there's something in it, even though this video was okay, and this dad was involved, but everything was based on such stereotypes: mother, father, daughter and son. And when a little kid watches such a video, it can really tell them that's a real life." (R 7.2)

According to some parents, the products advertised in these types of videos are not suitable for the age of children, which can have negative consequences for them. Some adults criticised children's makeup products, as they believed that children of this age should not be allowed to do makeup and such products should not be advertised. This opinion was caused by the fear that children would enter adulthood too quickly.

"And I believe that's an ad and such things, such toys, have existed for many, many years. When I was a child, such things existed. But there were no such information carriers to advertise the products. People were making bracelets and there were products for kids referring to adulthood. (...) There were 'little beauticians', 'little doctors', 'little kitchens and beads', but there weren't such ads. (...) I mean, the message itself, without any setting, would be just an ad, and here they create some behaviour, some fashion and model that I don't like." (R 11.2)

On the other hand, some parent interviewees appreciate the promotion of spending family time together. According to them, it was not a production created only for profit. They believed that the parents of the main character create films most of all for fun and spending time with their children, treating it as their hobby and not as the source of income. In addition, making bracelets together seemed to be a very positive aspect of the film, as it is a useful and developing activity for girls aged 8-11.

"I had such kit when I was a kid and I really liked it. So, it's nice that the kid can create the bracelet, choose some beads, here she improves her motor skills. (...) to me, it's quite positive. For example, I like that the whole family is involved and that they are doing this together. (...) In my opinion, if something is good, why not promote it. If something is nice, if something is interesting." (R 7.1)

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According to parents, children might be unaware of promotional messages in the presented videos. They believe that adults notice many potentially harmful elements in videos, but children are probably unaware of them. In their opinion, children simply watch a girl playing with her toys and do not notice all the rest that adults find so blatant. However, they believe that they can protect their children against such content by proper upbringing. For example, children who have other hobbies than the internet would not be so vulnerable to what the influencers say and do.

"I think that some part of children won't see it. It depends on how the child is raised. Because sometimes kids are so… parents raise them in such a way that they are keen on… I don't know… sport, travel or something like that, not the appearance and the toys strictly like My Little Pony." (R 8.2)

Some parents do not really know what TikTok is and honestly admit that they do not even care. Some of them said that they saw only a few videos from this application and they did not like the ones presented to them. They do not agree with the TikTok convention and do not want to participate in the creation and viewing of such content. However, some parents admitted that they have this application for two reasons. First, to know what movies are there. On the other hand, they watch the videos for themselves because they find them funny and entertaining.

"TikTok is interesting, we can find a lot of funny and valuable things there, however there are lots of bad things too, demoralizing things. I don't like that it works in such a random way, it's not personalised, nobody knows what you'll get. So, when it comes to children, it could be dangerous. Nobody knows what may be displayed to a child and it could be inappropriate." (R 7.1)

Many parents were surprised to find that there are product placements in short videos posted on TikTok. They recognized that these films were designed solely and exclusively to advertise products. Even the presence of a fictional outline did not make their impression wane, as they rightly noticed that TV commercials also had a storyline and were similarly short as TikToks.

"I think both TikToks contained product placement. I mean, the second one was slightly shorter and maybe more people would see it, because that is the advantage of TokTok that there are shorter videos there, because longer ones are watched less often. In the first TikTok I don't like that this girl gets new gifts every now and then. The second video has nice music." (R 9)

The comparison of what parents and children think of children influencers is presented in Table 3. Undoubtedly, parents have noticed a larger number of negative consequences of being exposed to children influencers than kids, but still some interviewees perceived the watched videos as harmless or even positive (promoting family time together). Surprisingly, the children showed a high level of awareness of product placement in YouTube and TikTok videos. Moreover, they know that creators look for profits on social media, but they also accept this fact as something natural and normal.

Table 3
Comparison of children's and parents' cognitive attitude towards children influencers

Children	Parents
• Notice that the characters in videos are insincere and the reality presented is not true • Are aware of the importance of views, subscriptions, and likes under the videos • Most of the children were able to notice product placement in presented videos • Believe that product placement in videos is normal practice, necessary for creators to earn money	• Point out negative consequences of being exposed to videos of children influencers such as presenting distorted family image, traditional gender stereotypes, advertising products not suited to the age of children • Some interviewees appreciate the promotion of spending family time together • Believe that by proper upbringing they can protect children from the influencers' negative impact • Think that children are unaware of product placement in influencers' videos • Some interviewees were unaware of product placement in videos their children were watching on TikTok

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4.2. Emotional Component of the Attitude Towards Children Influencers

The topic of children influencers, as well as the videos presented, raised mostly negative emotions among both children and parents. The highest level of emotion among the study participants was associated with blackmailing other characters to make them test the products presented in the YouTube video.

Although children participants (especially girls) declared that they liked the videos and found them interesting, negative emotions also appeared. After watching the YouTube film, many children expressed negative feelings about the behaviour of the main character and her mother towards the girl's father and younger brother. The children did not like the fact that the products placed in this film had been tested on them. Children said that the men had become victims of blackmail (mother gave an ultimatum: either they let women do their makeup or she would not cook dinner tomorrow). Many children said that this behaviour was "unfair".

"I liked this video, but she seems to be bragging, like: wooow, how amazing! She wants everybody to pay attention to her, how cool, I want to have the same stuff too. (...) Besides, everybody can see that they are rich, because I watched an episode, where they showed what they got for Santa Claus Day and she got a doll and when I checked it on Allegro it cost 200 złotys. And she got something else too." (R 2)

The scene of putting makeup on the father's face, because otherwise he would not eat dinner, was controversial also for parents. There were voices that this was blackmail and the use of other people for their own purposes. Many parents were also outraged by the stereotypes on which this film is based. The mother looks nice and prepares meals, and the father goes to work, earns a living, and cannot cook.

"Nobody can treat another person like that, it doesn't matter who it is, a spouse, a child, or a stranger. Blackmail is blackmail. It doesn't matter whether it is emotional or physical, it is always manipulating another person, and that's wrong." (R 8.2)

Another thing that raised a high level of emotions among parents was the fact of giving children presents without any occasion. Some of the study participants felt that it is improper, while others disagreed with this opinion. Parents pointed out that the girl received several gifts at once without any occasion, which may arouse viewers' envy and a sense of inferiority. Some parents said that they did not mind the products themselves but found the form of advertising outrageous.

Adults noticed that children of poorer families may feel humiliated and sad after watching such a video because their parents cannot afford this kind of entertainment. On the other hand, they know that watching another child play with toys is often a substitute for actual possession of these products. Usually, just looking is enough and gives the child a sense of satisfaction.

"(...) The child of a poorer family, watching this video, may feel jealous, inferior, undervalued when parents cannot afford entertainment on the same level as the child in the movie. It could be wrong, in my opinion." (R 8.1)

"I will compare it with my memories. When I was a little girl, I used to stop by a shop in front of the railway station. It was a toy store and I always stopped when I was going somewhere with my mother, because there were toys and dolls. I loved all the dolls and I always wanted to own them. For me, the same thing happens on YouTube and TikTok. Watching toys online may be as attractive as that storefront when I was a kid. Because now we live in a different world, more virtual." (R 10)

Another topic that seemed to be very controversial – dressing the daughter to look better in online lessons – among permissive parents was not so problematic. They believed that the mother had good intentions and wanted her daughter to do well. They also argued that there is nothing wrong with giving children gifts without occasion, because childhood is the time to pamper children and give them the best. They also see nothing wrong with their children seeing such

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productions. They expressed opinions that this kind of videos is always better than playing games or watching influencers promoting pathology or other content definitely unsuitable for children.

"It depends on whether I show this video to my child or if she finds it herself and wants to watch it. I would prefer her to watch this video rather than a gamer who curses all the time. I think this content is a bit better and more appropriate." (R 7.1)

"This video did not arouse my outrage, because I take into account that people have fun making these videos. They want to show a part of their world, influence somebody. (...) This is the way the world is now, and I know how it is. People will do it. I think there are worse things online than 'Hejka tu Lenka'." (R 10)

Permissive parents liked that the main character's mother emphasized impropriety of her cosmetics for the girl and that she bought her cosmetics that were suitable for her. They do not mind placing such products, as they are not harmful. The same parents also shared a positive opinion about TikTok, believing it to be an innocent pastime for their children and seeing no reason to forbid it. They believed that this is the world and they cannot change it, they can only control their children as much as they can.

The vast majority of adult interviewees expressed a negative opinion on product placement in YouTube and TikTok films aimed at children. According to many of them, it is even immoral and should not occur at all. There were arguments that this is cheating children, for example, about the advantages of the product and taking advantage of the naivety of young people. The interviewees also pointed out that many adults fall for this type of advertising, let alone children who are not fully aware of what they are watching. They are outraged that the authors of such advertisements do not think in any way about the child's welfare, but about how to sell the product and earn as much money as possible. Some parents think it is heartless. They especially disliked putting toys in the hands of other children, as they think their offspring may feel jealous.

"To my mind, it is taking advantage of children and their naivety. Because everybody knows that the kid sees something and goes crazy because he wants it. And when somebody puts those toys in other kids' hands, the kid wants it more. That's why, to my mind, it is taking advantage of children." (R 7.3)

"The kids will start to act like a robot, they won't analyse any information from the ads. Advertising is the leverage of trade, but now it went too far, and ad producers and sponsored links crossed the moral line." (R 8.2)

Also, some people were against creating YouTube channels with children at all. They believe that young people are used by their parents to advertise products and obtain material benefits from it. Adults noticed many dangers that come from this, for example, what if the existence of the whole family depends on YouTube income, or what will happen in the future to a person who has gained popularity at a young age and is unable or unwilling to continue this business on social media afterwards.

"(...) I feel doubled. First, I said that people have fun and this is their idea for life, but when there's too much and the kid is, I'll say it in bad words, exploited, and when the products are placed over and over again to my mind it's immoral." (R 10)

On the other hand, there were voices that it was a phenomenon that could not be escaped. One mother admitted that the Walt Disney Company had been doing it for years, e.g., by building Disneyland. Some parents think that it is inevitable to see ads, because that is just the way the world is now, thus, there is nothing wrong with advertising products for children. There was also the opinion that there is nothing wrong with product placement in films aimed at children, because children do not have their own money and the decision to buy the products is up to the parents. Their statements showed that what the children watch does not influence reality, and even if there were no advertisements aimed at children, the offspring would still ask their mother or father to buy selected products because of, for example, fashion.

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"And here's the problem that children, I'm not saying that adults are super aware, but children are usually less aware what they are looking at. They do not always know that they see an ad and that it exists only to spend money and buy things. On the other hand, I have a feeling that Disney has done it in a similar way since it was founded. Even the existence of Disneyland, I think that's an ad." (R 7.2)

"I wonder if product placement did not exist, some brands would still appear, it would be just more natural, not bought, and it would still influence children. Children don't buy things by themselves, but they press their parents to do so. Finally, it is the parents who make the decision. All in all, I think, it's probably moral." (R 9)

Some parents admitted that some products could be placed in films aimed at children. In their opinion, toys aimed at child development, requiring logical thinking and planning, could be advertised in this way. There was also an interesting idea that influencers could advertise garlic lozenges, fish oil, or other healthy products for children that they do not want to take voluntarily. A child, observing his or her favourite influencer, could learn healthy habits and appropriate attitudes.

"Garlic lozenges and cod liver oil should be advertised in such a way, because they are healthy for children and these products that are very good and healthy should be communicated in an interesting way. (...) Good and safe products should be advertised in such a way, I agree, but products that fool the kids, not really." (R 11.1)

"In my opinion, when there are products that develop some skills, are for some kind of development, for example: some creative sets, and Lego sets for boys. Something constructive, where kid improves his or her motor skills and some logical thinking skills, to mull something over, to plan or build something. Something like that." (R10)

YouTubers' shops where they sell products related to their channel turned out to be a very controversial topic. The subject divided the parents and made them feel torn. They understood that everyone wants to earn and has the right to open their own online business; however, they felt that their children, who are passionate about their favourite YouTubers, would like to have whatever they put in their shops. They also said with some regret that their children considered influencers their idols, their authority. In their opinion, someone who plays games all the time should not be an authority figure and, in a way, they do not understand why their kids like it so much. They know that many people (adults as well) like to buy gadgets with their favourite characters, but the purchase decision depends primarily on who the idol is, whether he or she is not, for example, a "patho-influencer".

As can be seen in Table 3, the range of emotions was wider in the case of parents than in the case of children. In addition, extreme emotions such as rage were reported by parents and not children. It could be the result of the fact that young people are more familiar with this type of content and it does not raise many emotions among them. On the contrary, some parents were not familiar with such videos and also were more preoccupied with possible negative consequences for their children. However, it should be noticed that even among parents some positive emotions have appeared, especially among those who believe that there is nothing wrong with pampering their children.

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Table 4
Comparison of children's and parents' emotional attitude towards children influencers

Children	Parents
• Girls liked the videos more than boys, who described them as "girlish" • They do not like blackmailing in YouTube videos, because it seems unfair to them • They notice that the girl in the video is rifling with toys • The girls are jealous of the gifts the main character receives	• They do not like blackmailing in YouTube videos • They feel outraged by references to very traditional gender stereotypes • Mixed feelings about giving gifts to children without any occasion and growing up too early: some parents were strongly against, while others did not see anything wrong with unexpected presents and children using adult-like products • They describe product placement as immoral, because producers take advantage of children's naivety • Some parents' negative feelings towards children influencers were so negative that they postulated banning such an activity on social media • The others declare positive feelings towards the idea of advertising healthy and educative products in such a way

4.3. Behavioural Component of the Attitude Towards Children Influencers

The children interviewed often admitted that after watching YouTube and TikTok videos with product placements, they would like to own the products that the influencers presented. One part of the interviewees said that they used to ask their parents to buy such products, and the other said that they did not even dare to do so, because they knew that their parents would never buy them. Those who knew that they would not receive products recommended by influencers said that if they told their parents that they had seen this product on the internet, they would have no chance of receiving it.

"I am 100% sure that my mum wouldn't like to buy it." (R 6.2)

Those children who know that adults would be able to give them such a thing turn to their parents with a request and sometimes receive it, but usually for special occasions such as birthdays or Christmas.

"(Would you like to buy something from a YouTuber?) Yes. I've actually bought some. For example, I have a calendar and some other things. (...) I often get them, but especially for birthday or name day. (...) And then they buy me things that I want the most." (R1)

Children playing games and watching YouTubers who play declare that they do not blindly follow what the influencer has. If a YouTuber in the virtual world has good equipment or the special appearance of the character, children do not feel the need to have identical items. One of the interviewees admitted that he bought what he liked, only sometimes being inspired by what he had seen on YouTube. However, there are items that all players want to have, and then they also aim to get them.

"I mean, when they're advertising a ball, it occurs to me that I could have a new ball. But then I buy myself some other ball which I like." (R3)

Some children said that in the past they asked their parents to buy such products more often because when they were younger, they watched a lot of videos showing and reviewing toys (e.g., the unboxing channels). Now they have started watching films on a different subject and they sometimes ask their parents to buy some items, but less frequently. The products that the children mentioned are: dolls, a diary, crayons, slime that can be eaten, gaming equipment and gadgets related to YouTubers' channels.

"It was a fact when I was watching the Martyna Zabawa channel [unboxing channel]. She was opening mystery boxes. There's a shop called Flying Tiger and she was opening mystery

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boxes from this shop. I really wanted to get them, but when we went to the store, there were no mystery boxes. (...) Now, I sometimes get some products, but when I give back money to my parents. Sometimes they just buy it, but sometimes they disagree." (R2)

"Hmm, I don't really remember. When I was little, they bought me some things, but now I watch fewer of these videos and they don't recommend any equipment." (R4)

"Some time ago, yes, but now no. (...) I don't know if they would let me buy something, I haven't asked." (R5)

As far as parents are concerned, it turned out that they are rather sceptical about the products advertised by influencers. They believe that these products are of low quality and definitely not worth the price. Some parents admitted that they preferred to take their children to a toy shop and let them choose something rather than buy them products advertised on the internet. In addition, they declared that if a child asked for a product recommended by the influencer, they would show him or her other similar products, so that the child could decide whether the one recommended by the influencer was definitely the best.

"I would go with my daughter to the shop to let her see what other products look like. For example, if she wanted a diary, I would go to the shop to look how other diaries look. She would evaluate if other diaries aren't better than this." (R 8.2)

Parents clearly emphasized that they would be willing to buy their child a product advertised by the influencers only if they really thought that it would be useful, of good quality, and if a special occasion connected with gift giving was coming.

"I think that, okay, my child wants this, but children usually want a lot of things in a short period of time. So, I look at products that would really work and that we could buy for birthday in half a year." (R 7.2)

"If my daughter came to me twice a day and asked for two presents a day, obviously I would refuse. However, if my daughter came to me from time to time and showed me something that she really liked, and she made it clear that this product is cool, and she would use it, then I would agree." (R 8.1)

Adults admit that if a birthday, name day, or Christmas is coming, they are more likely to decide on such a purchase. They believe that children, if they could, would like to have everything, and they do not want to teach them that all their desires can be fulfilled.

"I think that's very easy to ask for something when Christmas is coming, because everybody gets presents then. (...) I think that we are willing to buy such products, but certainly for some occasion, not just like Lenka got." (R 9)

"It can be different, because it depends on the financial situation and the approach to children, but some parents definitely buy their children products, at least because they want peace of mind. And children, of course, have their own ways to manipulate their parents. (...) To my mind, maybe I wouldn't buy such a product, but for some occasion if my kid would really want it etc. and it would be his dream gift, then for birthday, name day or another occasion I would buy it." (R 11.1)

The comparison of intended behaviour after watching influencer videos of children and parents is presented in Table 5. The children declared that they would like to have the products placed in influencer videos. However, many young interviewees do not even try to ask their parents to buy them, because they know that their requests would be rejected. These answers are consistent with those of parents, who admitted that children often asked for the products seen on the internet, but intended to buy them only on special occasions and when they proved to be really useful and of good quality.

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Table 5
Comparison of children's and parents' behavioural attitude towards children influencers

Children	Parents
• Children want to possess the same or similar products that were placed in the video • Children who know that parents are willing to buy placed products ask them to do so • Children whose parents are willing to buy the featured products get them as presents for a special occasion • Some children do not ask for products from the internet because they know that their parents are not willing to buy them • Children declare that when they were younger, they used to watch more toys unboxing videos and ask for such products more frequently	• Parents are sceptical of the quality of products promoted by children influencers. • They would prefer to show their children other products with similar properties and let them choose between brands • They are willing to buy such products only if children prove that they are useful and of good quality • They are more willing to buy products that children want for special occasions, such as birthdays.

5. DISCUSSION

As shown in previous studies (Phelps et al., 2004; Cheung et al., 2009), at least some children are not aware of product placement in influencers' videos and rather treat this type of content in terms of good advice from older colleagues. However, it should be noted that the general level of awareness of advertising in social media videos among children was higher than their parents suspected.

This study supports the findings of Folvord et al. (2019) and Martinez and Olson (2019) as interviewed children were eager to buy products presented in influencers' videos. Still, this desire does not translate into their buying behaviour directly as they do not have their own money. Parents play the role of guardians of children's shopping decision, and according to our young interviewees, deny to buy products recommended by influencers. Interestingly, parents declared that they were eager to succumb to the pester power of their offspring on special occasions such as birthday or Christmas.

As Coates et al.'s (2019) study indicated, awareness of watching a promotional content is not enough to deter children from behaving in accordance with the influencers' intentions. Our study may shed some light on these surprising results. Even children who were perfectly aware that influencers were featuring certain products in their movies for money declared that they would like to possess these products. This could be explained by the fact that children interviewees see product placement on social networks as something natural and normal and do not feel like they are being deceived or manipulated.

According to existing studies, parents play a role in influencing the perception of product placement in videos and attitudes toward the sponsor (Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Naderer et al., 2018). Parental mediation refers to the strategies parents use to minimize the negative influence of social media content on their offspring (Jiow, Lim, & Lin, 2017). The collected data can broaden our understanding of parental mediation, which in existing studies was conceptualized as overseeing what children do on the internet or talking about it. The conducted interviews suggest that parental mediation might also take the form of showing children how interesting the world outside the internet might be and helping them to find offline hobbies.

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6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate three components of attitude of children and parents towards children influencers and the content they present on social media. After conducting a series of individual and focus group interviews with 18 participants who were exposed to one Youtube and two TikTok videos of chosen children influencers, many conclusions can be drawn that can broaden our understanding of attitude towards such social media content.

As far as the **cognitive component of attitude** is concerned, the study showed that children are quite critical of the movies they watch. They choose the creators they want to follow and are able to judge their behaviour. As it turned out, not all children noticed the ads on YouTube and TikTok videos. They are aware of the products they are viewing but are not able to determine whether it is a paid promotion or good advice from an influencer. Interestingly, even children who are aware of product placement in influencers' videos, seem not to see anything wrong with this practice and perceive it as a natural part of social media content. Some parents enumerated a long list of possible negative consequences of watching influencer content by youngsters, while others believe that proper upbringing can limit them.

Referring to the **emotional component of attitude**, it should be stressed that the observed level of emotions was higher among parents than among children. Many parents initially declared not to see anything wrong with the videos their children watch, but after getting aquatinted with sample videos, they started to feel surprised and disgusted by the conveyed message. Some YouTubers become children's idols and that could cause many problems.

While focusing on the **behavioural component**, it appears that many children deny asking their parents to buy them products recommended by the influencer. This is happening mostly because they do not believe that parents will fulfil their requests. At the same time, parents seem to challenge this belief, at least to some extent, by admitting that they are willing to buy products advertised on social media for their children for special occasions like birthdays.

In terms of managerial implications, it should be noted that using children influencers to advertise products is effective because even if it does not lead to a purchase, it builds brand awareness in young people. It is possible that as soon as they start having their own money, they will become consumers of the brands they associate with their favourite influencers. Children remember products placed in videos and are eager to have them. However, parents who are not willing to buy such products, except for special occasions, stand in the way of buying. Nevertheless, product placement makes children aware of the brand and perhaps these young people will become consumers in the future.

Some limitations of this study should be considered. First, the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures led to the situation in which some of the interviews were held face-to-face, while others were conducted online. During teleconferences, there were technical problems that were stressful for some people and could have influenced their responses. Secondly, it was sometimes hard to obtain rich narratives from young children, which makes the collected material from children limited compared to the data obtained from parents.

Further research in this field should focus on determining what content attracts young people and why; what forms of advertising on the internet are most effective; how to include products in videos for the best results; and what are the factors that influence the effectiveness of product placement for children. By means of quantitative research, it would be possible to study a large population and define consumer trends among children.

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