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Children and the Skeptical Attitude toward Advertising. An Epistemological Evaluation

Abstract: This article has several distinct purposes: firstly, I will analyze the reasons why children end up being the target of advertising campaigns from an early age; secondly, I will assess the definite effects of advertising on children; thirdly, I will analyze if the audiences of advertising campaigns develop skeptical attitudes regarding the advertisements they come into contact with; fourthly, I will identify the factors that determine the skeptical attitude toward advertisements; fifth, I will identify and assess the kinds of skepticism that children might develop toward advertisements and whether these kinds of skepticism are real states that children’s minds can acquire. The thesis I want to argue is that most research on the possibility of children developing a skeptical attitude towards advertising operates with a diluted concept of skepticism, which has the consequence of identifying a greater number of skeptical children (and adults). A weakened concept of skepticism results in the lowering of the age at which children are declared skeptical and, consequently, fit to be exposed to advertising. Such scientific results, even if they spring from the honest intentions of scientific research, seem to serve the interests of companies that want to make young children legitimate targets of advertising on all channels.

Keywords: children, advertising, skepticism, brands, accuracy-based skepticism, motives-based skepticism, informational asymmetry.