

# On an Advertisement of the Koton Company -The Misleading Children

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**Abstract** This article examines whether some advertisements may abuse children to make more money and reach broad target or not. This type of topic always is attractive in terms of media and psychologists and hence we just analyze one example advertisement, which is “Koton”, and by doing so, we see that it applies wrong strategies because of misleading children. With the help of this advertisement, we conclude that there is a huge relationship between advertisers and audiences in terms of marketing communications.

**Keywords:** *advertisement; marketing strategy, marketing communication*

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## 1. Introduction

Marketing communications are messages and related media used to communicate with a market. Marketing communications is seen as the promotion part of the marketing body that can be divided into four categories of price, place, promotion and product. This includes all kinds of practices such as advertising, branding, promoting, sponsoring, and involving in public relations.

Marketing communications offers a main activity so that all interested parties (large and small, charities, commercial, and government, educational and other organizations) can understand the intentions of others and appreciate the value of the goods and services offered. Marketing communication firms aim to make such that they can best provide the interests of their clients. Clients attempt to show that they are able to serve the superior value for their customers and have the competitive advantage. Things like globalization and breaking taking over partnerships change markets and the expectations.

The world of marketing communications is intriguing, thrilling, sometimes unpredictable, yet always challenging and evolving. New thoughts and ideas, creative process on customer analyzing continuously takes place. After all, manager’s aim to both finds new ways to communicate, to reach greater public but marketers are also aiming to develop long-term relationships and loyalty with their customers. Marketers therefore try to understand the trends, behavior, needs of their customers and the actions of competitors. The marketer’s choice of language, tools, and imagery reflects in the way the organizations get reputation, and these values are not perceived only in terms of brand values and profits but also in terms of their ethics and the impact organization have on the environment.

That is why marketing communications have a role and vision of making a coherent and consistent planning. This heavily involves ethical considerations, of whether it is right or wrong. Marketing communications of any type of organization can send messages about their ethical stance, both intentionally and unintentionally. Organizations have to have an active awareness of the ethics of the action they make, and understand the ethical consequences the marketing communication might create.

The term ‘good’ has many meanings. In market communications, it can mean to contribute effective marketing communication as well as it can mean that the effective communication is in the moral, ethical window. In this paper, we will examine one advertisement made by Koton for children that is misleading, shocking and fails to target the actual audience.

There are many daring, outrageous, and thoughtless media communication products that fail to grasp the reality as it is. Their main incentive lacks to understand certain sociological, psychological effects on the target audience. The Koton advertisement received great criticism throughout the nation and it can be considered as an example of a ‘bad’ marketing communications.

To understand how the Koton advertisement has a ‘bad’ effect on society, it is necessary to understand the natural desire to know how good things can be promoted and bad things avoided when targeting the audience of children. In order to do so, we will analyze the articles of “Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing” by Sandra L. Calvert and “Children and the Changing World of Advertising” Elizabeth S. Moore and link their concepts to the marketing communications ideas in the Koton advertisement to show that the marketers have failed to target group, plan the consequence and bypassed ethical issues.

## 2. Detailed Discussion of the Case Study

The Koton advertisement [1] is a kid's advertisement. It features different kids of young age being fashionable and being 'cool'. It shows of the way a kid grows up and the way he wears the best fashionable clothes, the way he is desired by other kids and the way others are jealous of him. The events are narrated by a charismatic voice. The first sentence the narrator says is that, 'when he was born, he did not cry, he high-fived the doctor'. The newborn baby is shown winking and smiling. Then, in the next scene, the baby is shown to make his first steps, wearing very 'nice' shoes. Again, the 2-year-old kid is enjoying its time, appearing happy and laughing to promote positive feelings between the kid and the clothes he is wearing. Throughout the 2 minute advertisement, the main connection and communication of "Kotton clothing is good" is linked by the narrator.

When the kid is around 7 years old, he is wearing sunglasses, having a scarf around his neck, his hair is combed and he appears to be an adult model. It shows how he greets his aunts as a 'gentlemen' and his facial expression is full of adult mimics rather than that of children's innocence. The commercial continues to hyperbolize the greatness of this kid, stating how he achieved to write before learning to read. In a sense, the commercial attempts to make the kid a hero through the fashion he wears. In the school scene, the kids that are wearing Koton clothing appear to look like adults, in the sense that the perception of beauty and good looking is directly visualized by the use of rich looking aristocratic image, such as the overuse of makeup, the thick black glasses of the kid (at 0:26) and the way they personify male and female relation as if they are flirting or hanging out. The other kids, such as the one shown at 0:31 have no make up, instead the kids have their hair very messy, and they look at the kid in awe and praise his coolness. This continues on till the narrator finishes with the statement that 'kids that have style wear Koton.'

This commercial has many faults in terms of marketing communications. Many customers decided to change the product as they thought that the main message of the Koton ad was undermining poor people. It gives wrong intentions to the kids. For instance, when the narrator says achieved to write before learning to read which means that an adult might understand that as he learned to flirt before learning to read. This is a bad implication of targeting a vulnerable child class. The way it narrates that the Koton wearing kids 'have style' was seen, as a message of be different than the poor. This is degrading.

The kid in the advertisement is hyperbolized. No kid would ever be as the kid shown in the commercial. This makes the communication misleading, especially for the kids that might get affected by the ad. It appeals to an adult perception of beauty that limits the children's freedom to live their childhood. It makes the intent of the ad dangerous.

## 3. Discussion of the Case Study Using Academic Research (Minimum 2 Papers) and the Course Material

This case study is related to the chapter that relates the ethics of marketing communications. Throughout the communication and media course, we have encountered various unethical marketing practices. The main issue here is that Koton is targeting a vulnerable group, children. As noted before, marketing communications are quite often accused of unethical behavior, where business practice and societal concerns clash and are tagged as wrong. The misleading concepts, and inappropriate messages used in the advertisement create negative consequences for customers, and due to the lack of regulations and ethical standards, such advertisements get approved and aired to the public.

The main tagline of ethics is based on certain moral and value standards that act for citizens on what is right and what is wrong. The Koton advertisement clearly puts the children in the form of adults, and inputs sexual and over-aged messages. This might harm the children's psychology and affect their lives that are not fit to the current behavioral guidelines. That is why, as the advertisement does not fit the social consciousness of the population, it is easy to tag the advertisement as unethical as it does not apply the golden rule, it is dishonest and misleading and the outcome rule shows that the population was shocked by such advertisement.

Consider that "children in the USA spend on average four hours per day watching TV and are exposed to about 25 000 commercials per year The Internet has further expanded the exposure of children to advertising and In 2002, approximately \$15 billion was spent in the USA on marketing communications directed at children, including TV and print ads, sales promotions, brand placement in movies and integrated merchandising plans, and in-school marketing." (p. 566-567, De Pelsmacker). This shows the interest the way firms target children, and sometimes they use adult techniques while trying to achieve an effect in the marketing process. This promotes kids to smoke, to drink and do other adult things. The ad Koton makes is targeted for kids varying from 5-18 years and yet their implementation shows it as if the kids are over 18. They obviously try to impress the adults and the family that will decide to buy for them, which makes the intent of the content inappropriate for the kids.

Furthermore, it would be logical to say that advertising to children is unfair and deceptive since they lack the cognitive skills and life experiences to judge objectively, and understand the motives behind the persuasive claims marketers make to gain advantage. Pelsmacker, in the course book tells that children are "unable to weigh evidence and make an informed decision" (568, De Pelsmacker).

Having mentioned about the general theory of targeting a vulnerable group in terms of unethical marketing, let's examine two research papers; "Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing" by Sandra L. Calvert and "Children and the Changing World of Advertising" by Elizabeth S. More to find the supporting evidence to prove that the Koton advertisement is indeed unethical.

### a. Paper 1: "Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing" by Sandra L. Calvert

In this paper, Calvert summarizes the general concept of advertising and marketing for the specific vulnerable target children. He shows that marketing to the target group children is a common action in the United States. According to US traditions, children get their own

disposable income and also have the influence of what their parents will buy for them, which is why marketers try to make a guess on how to make the money will spent on their products. Television currently makes the most out of the advertising revenue, however there are also newer technologies that provide innovative methods for marketers to get to children. Marketing methods such as branded environments, repetition, and free prizes are effective in getting the attention of children, making products stay fresh in their minds, and persuading their purchasing choices. Calver argues that immature cognitive development limits the ability of children especially younger than eight to understand the persuasive intent of commercials. That is why; there are public policies that regulate how advertisers can interact with children via television. Online environments are now and probably always will be less heavily regulated than more traditional media. Although marketing and advertising fuel the U.S. economy, the cost of that economic success requires considerable scrutiny.

The marketing strategies, as Calvert depicts make children that are younger than eight very vulnerable since these children are absent of the cognitive skills to understand the persuasive intent of television and online advertisements. Also, there are new stealth techniques that weaken the consumer defenses even of older children and adolescents.

Calvert shows that the implementations of government regulations by the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission give some sort of protection against advertising and marketing for children. He gives examples on how regulators have more control over television and radio communication rather than Internet. Overall, Calvert makes a conclusion that children live and grow up in an evolving very complex marketing environment where children's are influenced by marketing in terms of their preferences and behaviors. In his article he stresses to things such as:

- Although the kinds of products marketed to children have remained much the same, the buying power of children and adolescents has increased exponentially over time. (3, Calvert)
- Youths also have a big effect on the buying patterns of their families. From vacation choices to car purchases to meal selections, they have a very big power over the family spending.
- The key understanding on targeting children in marketing is the research on the effect of advertising on children of age-based changes in children's ability to understand commercial messages, particularly their intent (10, Calvert).
- Around age twelve and onwards, adolescents start to reason abstractly and are able to understand advertisers' motives even such that they grow suspicious about advertising (12, Calvert).
- In order to be effective, marketing campaigns must get children to attend to the message, desire a specific product, recognize and remember that product, and purchase it. How well children understand the persuasive intent of advertisements also affects the success of commercials. (13, Calvert).
- Another purported, though rarely studied, outcome of children's commercial exposure is an increased emphasis on materialism among younger children. (15, Calvert).

Linking this to our Koton advertisement, as Calvert explains, the Koton television advertisement uses the marketing techniques of repeating the same commercial message of being 'cool' and being classy' over and over again. This increases the idea that the Koton product is familiar and the chance of buying the Koton product increases they use branded character that plays in a TV show, which might promote their selling. Koton advertisement uses the attention-getting production features, such as a teenage background, simple but strong music, lots of makeup, and they put this in a set of actions. These features "charm children's interest in commercial content" (5, Calvert). In general, Calvert shows that marketers carefully analyze children's and adolescents' interest patterns- however it is interesting how the Koton advertisement fails to appeal to actual interests of the children by making them look older than what they are. Calvert's article shows the techniques and strategies made by the advertisement and in relation to Koton advertisement, it is clearly visible that Koton advertisement misinterpreted the interest pattern of the children, but instead attempted to plant a new one that was ridiculous. Furthermore, the Koton advertisement shows labels of the prices to give premiums, such that the parents are affected in terms of price understanding. They make "buzz" of the product by making the poor look weak and the Koton clothed people look strong and mighty. Considering the target range of the Koton commercial, "Young children "buy in" to these fantasies and the consumer culture they represent".

Koton advertisement tries to make a marketing campaign by attempting to get children to attend to the message, by making a fictional world full of children's content with action, sound effects and loud music. They attempt to make the children desire their specific product by making hyperbolizing the Koton kids. Furthermore Koton advertisement tries to make the kids recognize and remember that product, and purchase it.

Lastly, as Calvert stresses out, this brings an outcome of that the children's commercial exposure makes a great emphasis on materialism among young children. The Koton advertisement makes stress that materialism, buying their products makes people happy, and those who do not have their product are shown unhappy. The American Psychological Association task force "has argued that heavy advertising and marketing campaigns are leading to the sexualization and exploitation of young girls." (15, Calvert) and similarly in the Koton advertisement, this exposure brings heavy sexualizing and materialism approach, which deems to be unethical for the Turkish society.

#### **b. Paper 2: "Children and the Changing World of Advertising" by Elizabeth S. Moore**

In this paper, Elizabeth S. Moore talks about the concerns about children's ability to fully comprehend and evaluate advertising messages. She questions the fairness of marketing to children and shows that there are many unresolved issues at the current day. The advertising media is evolving, and in fact it is getting more sophisticated every day. The promotional offers and creative appeals are being developed, and in all these, Elizabeth examines these issues and tries to propose how children's advertising research can be employed to create a safer, and fair implementation.

She asserts that Internet have further expanded its reach on children, with “88% of children between 5 and 14 years old use computers, and 53% have access to the Internet” (p 1, More). Though there is a claim that marketers are ‘unfair’ on children, so oppose this and think that vulnerabilities are often overstated, since the company has the right to provide product information through advertisement to help the parents and children’s make a decision. She stresses that there is little empirical evidence to that children lack ability to comprehend in multimedia platforms. We personally think that children are much more adaptive than adults, and therefore they are affected more than adults in newer platforms. Hence, Elizabeth tries to answer the children’s developmental capacities in order to reply to ethical questions about the fairness and unfairness of marketing issues.

The main statements of her argument that is related to our case study is as follows

- Children are a big target in the market (in US, they account for 24\$ billion direct spending, and influence around \$500 billion in family spending (1,More)).
- Advertising has a direct impact on children (they learn undesirable social values, are exposed to consuming such as obesity)
- Growing children respond differently at different ages (older children differ both in terms of their general understanding of advertising’s purpose as well as in how they deploy this knowledge when responding to specific advertisements)
- Younger children are more and especially vulnerable.
- Children between the ages of 8 and 12 tend not to invoke their knowledge of persuasive influence attempts when viewing a television commercial.

She further continues to discuss how there exists certain protections in the marketplace such as the Federal Trade Commission, however she states that “A principal result of these events is that fundamental issues raised about children’s capacity to understand, and defend themselves against advertising have *never been fully resolved*” (p.3, Moore). Children are inevitably exposed to advertisements, with many platforms relying on revenue based on advertisement.

Her research shows that “older children (11–12 year olds) may actually be more attentive to the entertainment provided by advertising than younger children (7–8 year olds), and are more likely to allow it to shape their interpretations of product usage”(p.4, Moore). Older children apparently were more fascinated, understood the details of the advertisement, and detect the different levels of meaning and ad was putting, such as hyperbole and fantasy. Thus, she resulted that the children’s increased cognitive behavior knowledge and experience increased their receptivity, which integrates them more to the advertisement they are exposed to. She concludes that this age group (8-12) is especially susceptible to be influenced.

In terms of connection to our case study, Moore makes clear distinctions on the cognitive behavior of children and their approach towards marketing commercials. She shows that children have to understand two things. Firstly, they should distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content. Then, the children must understand advertising’s persuasive intent to interpret selling messages. The Koton advertisement of the case study abuses both of these aspects. They implement a lot of

commercial content and try to load a lot of persuasive intent to make the impression that kids look ‘cool’ wearing Koton. The Koton advertisement makes fictional fantasy characters and as Moore shows, this might really affect the age group of 8-12 where they might fail to interpret between the persuasive intent and the reality.

## 4. Conclusion

This research has helped us understand various ways and tricks the Marketing society has been using in order to maximize their profits and promote their products by reaching a vulnerable target of children. While researching, we thought there is no single baseline in underlying the morals in terms of good and bad. The market has certain intent, and the society has certain norms, and to be able to meet the demand and supply of marketing in equilibrium a very thorough analysis of the desired patterns have to be made by the marketing team. However, at many times marketers make false assumptions, or do not think of the consequences they might bring by having their own intent of selling the product. While doing so, at times the advertisement can unintentionally bring undesirable results that were intended to have a positive feedback in the first place. The Koton advertisement is one such example that fails to target the vulnerable target of children and uses undesirable marketing techniques that are tagged as unethical.

Through the research of Calvert and Moore, we have understood that children’s cognitive behavior increases with age and the way they interpret and desire the marketing products changes enormously. Up to age 8, the might get fooled by the advertisement and fail to understand the intent, but rarely do they remember the content to have the marketer’s intent fully effective enough for completing the buying of the product. The 8-12 age group is the critical age where the children are not fully able to grasp the tricks of the advertisers as well as they have the cognitive strength to attend, desire, and understand the fantasy behind the advertisement. Koton advertisement could be tagged as appealing to this group that makes it targeting the most vulnerable group of the children. For this reason, the Koton advertisement should appeal to ethical norms such that it would not trick the children from reality however the advertisement’s hyperbole of a hero wearing Koton clothes, the way he flirts out implying sexual messages, and the way the narrator uses his smooth voice to support this subliminal message is an unethical approach on changing the minds of the kids into buying this product.

At the same time, the research we have made has provided us the high figures on how children affect their parents into buying products due to advertisements. Koton advertisement is targeting the children however, it will be their parent that will buy the product that is why they want to appeal to the parents too. For this reason they put price tags on cloths to show their competitive advantage and give information about the pricing such that the parents can have a clearer understanding. One of the reason to make the kids look as adults might be to appeal to the desires of the adults (parents). By making appeal to the desires of the parents, they leave a message to the parents too that gives the message of that their kid will be looking

good and happy and therefore the parent should support the kid by buying the Koton product. This is in a sense dividing the target audience into two and for this reason the Koton advertisement fails to approach to the desires of the kids. We think (as well as the majority of the public that criticized this advertisement) that by norms, kids of 8-12 age should be playing outside, getting dirty, enjoying their childhood instead of acting like grown-ups, flirting or trying to be classy or cool. For this reason, it is unethical to divert the kids into a fantasy world that is suitable for actual happiness, but is based on materialism and sexuality.

By researching on this topic, and using two good sources by Moore and Calvert on advertising to children, we have outlined the main marketing techniques, issues, and developments in vulnerable market targeting. We have linked their concept to the Koton advertisement and it can be concluded that Koton advertisement targets the

most vulnerable class of children in between age of 8-12 and it produces a false fantasy of that being classy revolves around wearing Koton products. It attempts to invade children's fantasy, and change their perception using adult concepts and sexual subliminal messages, which makes the advertisement unethical by the norms of the Turkish society.

## References

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