

# *An ethical perspective on the relationship between Media Communication – Education: Case study*

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** *Since advertising to children and adolescents has become ubiquitous, scholars who study the significance and influence of adverts on children raise questions about the communication approach towards this category of the audience.*

*This study focuses on two national TV stations which have the highest number of viewers and consequently the highest number of advertisements and time dedicated to it. Some of the adverts repeatedly broadcast on these television channels do not*

*comply with the ethical standards of MES or the legal framework for Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *The method used in this case study is the observational method - the monitoring of the national TV media stations during particular time slots.*

**Findings:** *The findings and recommendations will be relevant to all the stakeholders.*

**Originality/value:** *Advertisements in time slots, in which children are actively watching television, are not in accordance with the ethics that are trumpeted by the law on pre-university education and the law on audio-visual broadcasts. We can identify the violation of some articles of the law on which the Audiovisual Media Authority operates.*

**Keywords:** *TV adverts, communication, education, children, legal framework.*

## Introduction

Communication and education are two disciplines that are strongly intertwined. The guiding principles of education are universal values such as fairness, impartiality, non-discrimination, equal treatment, dignity, etc. that ensure the path on which education should progress. The “Basic Competence” in education is the competence that all individuals need for fulfilment and personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The first key competence of the learning process is the competence of communication and free speech. For children and young people to develop their personalities, learn and participate actively in society, it is important that they understand the messages addressed to them and express them appropriately through language, symbols, signs, codes and artistic forms.

To become effective communicators, students get all the needed support to use the tools and opportunities of communication and express their thoughts independently, critically and creatively. (Pre-University Education Law, 2018)

Thoughts and ideas are transmitted through communication. Education, on the other hand, is the process of learning according to a framework of ethical rules and certain competencies. Often, we, as members of the audience, get a lot of different messages from mediums that aim to inform. This includes the mass media as a medium that plays the main role in informing the public of every age.

In this study, we will focus on the advertisements in the audio-visual media that have a national license, and that advertise different products of different companies during the advertising spaces.

## Literature review

There has always been a controversy regarding the adverts broadcast on television related to content and form. The relationship among media communication and education is a dynamic and influential space where ethical considerations play a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment for students.

A wide range of channels, including digital media and internet resources in addition to traditional textbooks, are included in media communication in education. Its influence on instructional strategies, student engagement, and the entire educational experience goes beyond simple information delivery. It is imperative to acknowledge the ethical ramifications of these factors in order to preserve a responsible and equitable learning environment.

While creating content, media professionals ought to prioritise the truth, transparency, and impartial depiction of information first. The development of digital media has made protecting student privacy and utilising technology ethically of utmost importance. Media workers ought to follow moral guidelines that guarantee the ethical manufacturing and distribution of adverts they produce and broadcast on their channels.

Sometimes the adverts tend to be as persuasive and attractive as they can without taking into consideration the age of the audience.

In addition, the marketing of unhealthy products, such as unhealthy food, alcohol, and tobacco, has been connected to a variety of negative consequences for young people. Food marketing boosts children's immediate and future consumption, product placements and advergames influence food brand choices, and commercial television viewing is linked to childhood obesity. (Jordan, A. B., & Romer, D., 2014).

Youth exposure to alcohol advertising has also been associated with negative outcomes or poor health. Alcohol advertisement increases the risk of teenagers starting to use alcohol and increases the amount of alcohol consumed by adolescents who presently do consume it. (Anderson, P., De Bruijn, A., Angus, K., Gordon, R., & Hastings, G., 2009).

For many years, children have been identified as a vulnerable consumer group by studies for decades due to their developmental capacities. Many studies have found that children do not have the ability to discern persuasive intent in advertisements until they are >7 years old, based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. (John, D. R., 1999).

## Ethics in Communication and Media

The relationship between ethics in communication and advertising involves grabbing attention, swaying customer behaviour, and upholding a commitment to honesty, transparency, and respect. The trust between brands and their audience is crucial to maintaining in a world where commercials are constantly competing for consumers' attention. This is why ethical considerations are crucial.

Ethical communication is a type of communication based on certain values, such as truth, a concise message, and the responsibility that comes from one's word and the actions that follow it. Thus, ethical communication defines a framework or a set of acceptable messages that conform to the code of inclusive language and code of ethics.

This important element of the media landscape is essential for forming narratives, swaying behavior, and influencing public opinion.

Another essential ethical factor in advertising is respect for people's dignity. In addition to being unethical, using derogatory language, stereotypes, or imagery that objectifies people runs the danger of offending a wide range of sophisticated viewers. Advertisers should avoid using language that supports harmful stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes, as this may have an adverse effect on societal values and norms.

Advertisers must present information in a clear and understandable manner, avoiding manipulative techniques that exploit vulnerabilities or capitalize on misinformation.

A guiding concept that goes beyond the good or service being advertised is social responsibility. Advertisers have the ability to mould cultural narratives and impact societal attitudes. Aiming to avoid information that promotes unhealthy behaviours, unrealistic body images, or damaging standards, ethical advertisers take the larger effect of their messaging into account.

Any attempt to mislead or present confusing information is not ethical communication. In addition, the principle of "honesty" in ethical communication is inevitably connected with other fundamental principles – ethics and responsibility. Educators and media professionals have a responsibility to provide accurate and truthful information to students.

When discussing ethics in communication, we're talking about the values and norms that direct people and institutions towards using communication ethically and responsibly. It entails taking into account how communications affect certain people, communities, and society at large.

## Methodology

Hypothesis: The advertisements shown prior to the main news edition are not in accordance with the educational policy of the Ministry of Education and Sports and the code of ethics.

Research Question: Is the communication aimed at educating the audience on limits in relation to the educational framework?

The method used in this case study is the observational method - the monitoring of the national TV media stations during particular time frames.

## Case Study

This case study is a summary of the observations documented in audio and video formats, placing them in relation to the powers and authority that the law gives to the Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) for the regulation of the audiovisual market and the Curriculum Framework and Rules of Ethics for pre-university education.

Two of the main national audiovisual TV stations, which have the highest number of viewers and therefore the highest number of advertisements and TV time dedicated to them, have become part of this observational study.

Some of the advertisements that are repeatedly broadcast on these televisions are not in accordance with the ethical standards of MES or the legal framework for Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania in communicating audio-visual messages to the general public.

According to Law No. 97/2013 “FOR AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA”, amended by law no. 22/2016 dated 10.3.2016 Amended by Decision no. 56 dated 27.07.2016 of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Albania and with law no. 91/2017, Article 33, point 1, which defines “The Duties of the AAMSP” states that the audiovisual media service provider must:

1. The audio and/or audiovisual media service providers shall:
  - d) respect the rules of ethics and public morals and not broadcast programs that may encourage criminal acts;
  - f) ensure the protection of consumer rights;

As a result, if one of the points of this aforementioned law is not fulfilled, then the AMA must intervene by taking concrete steps according to the provisions made in the law and in the code of ethics of the Audiovisual Media Authority itself.

But how often does this happen? What are the cases that we have identified that constitute an ethical problem and that contradict the educational policy of MES and ethics in general?

According to Article 42 point 2. "Communications of a commercial nature in audiovisual broadcasts are not allowed to use ways of seducing viewers unconsciously and techniques for their suggestion. and point 5. Communications of a commercial nature in audiovisual broadcasts about alcoholic beverages are not allowed to be addressed especially to children, who must avoid their consumption by minors and must not encourage their excessive use by adults.

One of the selected cases is the advertisement of "Peja Beer" which is broadcast in a time slot in which children are part of the active audience, i.e. before the main news broadcast at 19.15 - 19.30h. This also contradicts the communication of the message because, until the last moment, it looks like an advertisement that aims to attract the viewer with the appearance of some girls and the placement of rhythmic music, which accompanies the whole advertisement in the background, which makes use of one of the most famous songs, sung by the most famous singer before the 90s, Vace Zela - a way of associating with feelings and previous experiences that originate from the past. So, here we are dealing with a way of unconsciously seducing the viewers and a technique for suggesting them through showing extravagantly dressed girls or a couple kissing at a time when the children are actively watching TV.

Another case is that of another national media and TV station, such as Top-Channel on Sunday, at 12.00, during a television show that is followed by children and adults such as 'Big Brother Fan Club', the above-mentioned advertisement appears, regardless of the time.

Additionally, there is the instance of the sexist "STELA" beer advertisement on TV KLAN at 20.03 hours, which airs before one of the most viewed episodes. The advertisement included the line, "When boys are best friends, they drink Stela beer." Also, it is evident in this advertisement that a male wearing prescription glasses is stigmatized, treated as the least attractive person, and told that no one should expect him to get a girl.

Another similar case that does not respect the time zone is ELBAR beer, which also appears on another national television and where the accompanying notice for alcoholic beverages is again missing.

Article 42, point 8, states: "Audiovisual broadcasting services must draft and implement codes of conduct regarding inappropriate communications of a commercial nature in their broadcasts, accompanying or included in programs for minors, food and beverages, that contain harmful or useless substances for the physical health of minors, especially those with a high content of fat, fatty acids,

salt, soda and sugar, which are beyond the permitted rates for a healthy food diet for minors, according to the guidelines of the AMA.

This also contradicts Article 46 point 1 - e) advertising, direct sales, direct sales materials, sponsorships, and other forms of commercial presentation, used in any broadcast service, especially those related to issues that may whether they are directly or not in the interest of minors, they must protect their interest, taking special care of their health.

Here we are dealing with a problem that is often noticed in communications, mainly for alcoholic and energy drinks, as in the case of B52, or other drinks with added sugar. These types of drinks cannot be shown at this time or must be accompanied by an instruction/voice message at the end of the advertisement, as in the case of medications, so they must be consumed only by people over 18 years old and the effects of these are harmful.

Another type of advertisement is related to medicines, such as the advertisement for a drug like PROSTAMAX, which has as its target group the middle-aged and elderly men who suffer from prostate problems. Cekja, as he is known by the general public, is a comedian, who in this case took the role of an elderly person who talks about the benefits of this medication in his sex life, and uses inappropriate language for an audience that includes children as well. This audiovisual advert is broadcast in the form of a promotional message that lasts for several minutes, with different testimonials from different users who emphasized the improvement of their sex life. This advertising message was aired on national television station KLAN on February 22, 2022, till April 28, 2022. It started at 10:00 a.m. and ran nonstop during the whole day even before before the main newscast at 7:30 p.m. Due to the language used by well-known comedian Sejfulla Myftari, popularly known as Cekja, and the fact that the entire message is presented to the public during hours when most of them are youngsters, this advertisement contains unsuitable content.

## Conclusions

Advertisements in different time frames, in which children are actively watching television, are not in accordance with the ethics that are trumpeted by the law on pre-university education and the law on audio-visual broadcasts.

We can identify the violation of some articles of the law on which the Audiovisual Media Authority operates.

The public responsibility of the media, and mainly that of the national media, is to educate the audience, even though such a debate regarding the role of television as an educator is in most of the cases opposed by the media owners.

The issue at hand could be prevented and its duration minimized if AMA's complaints council and monitoring section operated effectively.

The inconvenience created by the non-functioning or non-implementation of the law on audio-visual media is an added cost for the entire education system, which on the one hand tries to educate children with civic values and on the other hand the responsible authorities do not properly implement the regulation that has been approved to precisely avoid this issue which is more than ethical, it is related to society and its consequences are more than just social.

We can cultivate an educational environment that produces knowledgeable, critical, and ethically conscious people prepared to interact with the complexities of the modern world by acknowledging the roles that education and media professionals play, abiding by codes of ethics, and approaching challenges with an ethical mindset.

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