

# Consequences of Advertising Literacy among College Students

Namhyun Um<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hongik University; Associate Professor; goldmund@hongik.ac.kr

\* Correspondence

<https://doi.org/10.5392/IJoC.2023.19.3.122>

Manuscript Received 06 March 2023; Received 22 September 2023; Accepted 25 September 2023

**Abstract:** Due to recent developments in the media landscape, the lines between the commercial message and media content have blurred and consumers' advertising literacy is being challenged. Thus, a required skill and ability in our digital age is advertising literacy. This study is designed to investigate what consequences from advertising literacy arise. In such terms, this study proposes skepticism toward advertising, perception of advertising value, and attitude toward advertising. Study findings suggest that advertising literacy is likely to decrease consumers' skepticism toward advertising and enhance their attitude toward ad. In addition, this study finds that advertising literacy increases consumers' perceived value of advertising. Further research is proposed.

**Keywords:** Advertising Literacy; Skepticism Toward Advertising; Advertising Value; Attitude Toward Advertising

---

## 1. Introduction

Advertising has been a part of daily life and consumers are always surrounded with persuasive messages in the form of TV commercials, print ads, social media ads, influencer ads, PPL (product placement), branded contents, advergames, native ads and online behavioral targeting ads. In today's Internet-driven world, online ads have become more individualized and tailored to personal interests based on cookies and personal information collected by the third party. To date, dealing with persuasive messages in our complex media environment requires individuals to have a certain level of advertising literacy ability.

With the rise of the internet and social media, the line between content and advertising has blurred. Native advertising or branded content, which integrates promotional messages seamlessly into digital platforms, poses challenges for even adults in identifying advertising content [1]. Recently, influencer marketing on platforms like Instagram and YouTube has brought new challenges in advertising literacy. Recognizing when content is sponsored and understanding the influencer's relationship with the brand is an emerging focus in advertising literacy research [2].

Advertising literacy helps people understand, evaluate, and analyze persuasive messages. In other words, advertising literacy can serve as a defense against advertising, functioning as a filter when a person processes advertising messages. Due to the importance of advertising literacy, schools in many countries (including U.S.A., U.K., and Canada), start advertising literacy education as early as kindergarten and adopt it as a general course at the elementary school level. People who are literate in advertising are less susceptible to the persuasive influence of advertising.

Prior studies have mainly focused on the effects of advertising literacy among school children. Scarce is the research on the consequences of advertising literacy among college students. College students are among the primary consumers of digital content, including social media. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are flooded with native ads, influencer promotions, and sponsored content. Being literate in advertising helps students discern between genuine content and promotional materials. Thus, this study delves into what the ramifications, or consequences, are of advertising literacy among this population. In terms of the consequences of advertising literacy, this study proposes skepticism toward advertising, perception of

advertising value and attitude toward advertising. This study will provide a baseline understanding of the antecedents and consequences of advertising literacy among college students.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Dimensions of Advertising Literacy

Advertising literacy has been broadly defined as “a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to process and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter” [3]. More narrowly, advertising literacy can be defined as the skills and abilities to recognize, understand, analyze, interpret, and evaluate advertising [4]. Rozendaal and colleagues [5] proposed seven knowledge components of advertising literacy such as 1) recognition of advertising, 2) recognition of advertising’s source, 3) perception of intended audience, 4) understanding advertising’s selling intent, 5) understanding advertising’s persuasive intent, 6) understanding advertiser’s persuasive tactics, and 7) understanding of advertising’s bias.

Hudder and colleagues [4] suggested that advertising literacy consists of cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions. First, the cognitive dimension of advertising literacy refers to persuasion knowledge, which is defined as people’s personal knowledge about persuasion agents’ goals and tactics [5]. Second, affective advertising, according to Hudders et al. [4], means people’s conscious awareness of their initial emotional reactions toward advertising, and their skills or abilities to suppress or regulate these emotions. Third, moral advertising literacy refers to the skills, abilities, and propensity to morally evaluate advertising, as expressed by the beliefs and judgments people develop about the appropriateness of its tactics [4]. Rosendaal [5] proposed a three-dimensional conceptualization of advertising literacy that could lead to further research on advertising literacy. The three dimensions of advertising literacy are as follows: 1) conceptual, 2) performance, and 3) attitudinal.

### 2.2 Effects of Advertising Literacy

#### 2.2.1 Skepticism toward advertising

Advertising skepticism refers to people’s tendency to disregard or show disbelief in the claims of an advertisement [8]. Advertising skepticism varies from person to person, with some people showing low levels of skepticism and others showing high levels [9]. Obermiller and Spangenberg [8] suggested that people with high ad skepticism are likely to attend to ads less, likely to be less inclined to form beliefs consistent with ad claims, and more likely to counter-argue sources. It is certain that skepticism toward advertising serves as attitudinal defense when consumers are exposed to persuasive messages.

Skepticism toward advertising is considered an important outcome of recognition of persuasive attempt [10]. In short, advertising skepticism can help people question and discount advertising claims. Thus, it is plausible to assume that advertising literacy has a positive impact on consumers’ skepticism. The following hypothesis is thus posited:

**H1:** Advertising literacy is a positive predictor of consumers’ advertising skepticism.

#### 2.2.2 Advertising Value Perception and Attitude toward Ads

According to Ducoffe [11], advertising value refers to the subjective evaluation of the utility or relative worth of advertising to consumers. In short, advertising value can be defined as a cognitive assessment of the advertisements. Logan and colleagues [12] suggested that advertising value can assess the effectiveness of advertising because it can integrate the media experience with the advertising experience. Ducoffe [11] suggested that advertising value and advertising attitude are highly associated. Thus it is assumed that a consumer who assesses advertising to be valuable is likely to have a favorable attitude toward ads.

In general, attitude toward advertising is defined as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general” [13]. This conceptual definition emphasizes a consumer’s general attitude toward advertising rather than attitudes toward a specific advertisement or attitudes toward advertising through a specific medium [14]. As we discussed, advertising literacy refers to the skills and abilities to recognize, understand, analyze, interpret and evaluate advertising [4]. Therefore, people with

advertising literacy are likely to have low perceived advertising value as well as unfavorable attitude toward advertising. Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are posited:

**H2:** Advertising literacy is a negative predictor of consumers' advertising value perception.

**H3:** Advertising literacy is a negative predictor of consumers' attitude toward advertising.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Sample and Data Collection

In return for course credits, a total of 179 college students participated in this study. Among 179 study participants, 63 were male (35.2%) and 116 were female (64.8%). Of these 179 participants, juniors made up the majority (46.9%,  $n = 84$ ); the rest consisted of seniors (30.2%,  $n = 54$ ), freshmen (20.1%,  $n = 36$ ), and sophomores (2.8%,  $n = 5$ ). Their mean age was 23 years old. As for data-collection procedures, online survey invitation e-mails were sent out to students. Then, only those students who agreed to participate and provide consent were selected as participants. Afterwards, they were asked to click on the "Proceed" button to complete the survey.

#### 3.2 Measure

##### 3.2.1 Advertising Literacy

For measuring advertising literacy a 15-items scale was employed on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" based on a study by Cho [15]. Some items were as follows: 1) I can differentiate between advertisements and general content (things that are not ads); 2) I can search for more information after seeing an advertisement; 3) If there is an issue related to the advertisement, I can report it within the relevant period. The reliability for this scale was .75.

##### 3.2.2 Advertising Skepticism

For measuring advertising skepticism a 4-items scale was employed on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" based on a study by Mohr, Eroglu, and Ellen [16]. Four items were as follows: 1) Most advertising is very annoying; 2) Most advertising makes false claims; 3) If most advertising were eliminated, consumers would be better off; 4) Most advertising is intended to deceive rather than inform. The reliability for this scale was .83.

##### 3.2.3 Advertising Value Perception

Advertising value perception was measured on a 7-point scale anchored with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." Four items were as follows: 1) Advertising is valuable; 2) Advertising is useful; 3) Advertising is effective; 4) Advertising is important. Items were originally borrowed from Ducoffe's study [11] and modified for this study. The reliability for this scale was .86.

##### 3.2.4 Attitude toward Advertising

Subjects were asked to indicate, on a seven-point scale, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following three statements: 1) Overall, I consider advertising a good thing; 2) My general opinion about advertising is unfavorable; 3) Overall, I do like advertising [17]. The reliability for this scale was .85.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Hypothesis Testing

With the purpose of testing the research hypotheses, researchers ran a series of regression analyses to examine the impact of independent variable advertising literacy on the dependent variables—advertising

skepticism, advertising value perception, and attitude toward advertising. Table 1 shows correlations among variables.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Advertising Literacy	3.54	.441	1	-.299**	.345**	.471**
2 Advertising Skepticism	3.22	.511		1	-.421**	-.350**
3 Advertising Value Perception	3.80	.550			1	.679**
4 Attitude toward Advertising	3.54	.703				1

#### 4.2 Impact of Advertising Literacy on Advertising Skepticism

H1 posits that advertising literacy is a positive predictor of consumers' advertising skepticism. Table 2 shows results of the simple regression analysis of the independent variable advertising literacy on advertising skepticism. The simple regression model ( $R$  square = .089) is significant at 0.000. The regression findings indicate that there is a significant and positive impact of advertising literacy on advertising skepticism. Table 2 shows that 8.9% of the variation in advertising skepticism is explained by the independent variable advertising literacy. The findings indicate that advertising literacy (beta is - 0.299) is significant at 0.000. However, the negative coefficient indicates that advertising literacy decreases consumers' skepticism toward advertising. Thus in this study, H1 was not supported.

**Table 2.** Regression Result on Advertising Skepticism

Variable	$R$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Advertising Skepticism	.299	.089	-.299	14.98	.000
Advertising Literacy					

#### 4.3 Impact of Advertising Literacy on Advertising Value Perception

H2 posits that advertising literacy is a negative predictor of consumers' advertising value perception. Table 3 shows the results of the simple regression analysis of the independent variable advertising literacy on advertising value perception. The simple regression model ( $R$  square = .119) is significant at 0.000. The regression findings indicate that there is a significant and positive impact of advertising literacy on advertising value perception. Table 3 shows that 11.9% of the variation in advertising value perception is explained by the independent variable advertising literacy. The findings indicate that advertising literacy (beta is .345) is significant at 0.000. Unlike the proposed hypothesis, advertising literacy increases consumers' perceived value of advertising. Hence, H2 was not supported.

**Table 3.** Regression Result on Advertising Value Perception

Variable	$R$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Advertising Value Perception	.345	.119	.345	7.24	.000
Advertising Literacy					

#### 4.4 Impact of Advertising Literacy on Attitude toward Advertising

H3 posits that advertising literacy is a negative predictor of consumers' attitude toward advertising. Table 4 shows the results of the simple regression analysis of the independent variable advertising literacy on attitude

toward advertising. The simple regression model ( $R$  square = .222) is significant at 0.000. The regression findings indicate that there is a significant and positive impact of advertising literacy on attitude toward advertising. Table 4 shows that 22.2% of the variation in attitude toward advertising is explained by the independent variable advertising literacy. The findings indicate that advertising literacy ( $\beta$  is .471) is significant at 0.000. Study results suggest that advertising literacy has a positive impact on consumers' attitude toward advertising. Therefore, H3 was rejected in this study.

**Table 4.** Regression Result on Attitude toward Advertising

Variable	$R$	$R^2$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Attitude toward Advertising	.471	.222	.471	.234	.000
Advertising Literacy					

## 5. Discussion

Prior studies have found that parents' and teachers' simple comments on advertising can help children think more critically [18-19]. Buizen [20] found that advertising literacy education increases advertising knowledge and skepticism. Consequently, advertising literacy negatively influences consumers' attitude toward television commercials and their attitude toward television commercials. Against the authors' expectations, this study revealed that advertising literacy decreases consumers' skepticism toward advertising and influences, in a favorable manner, consumers' attitude toward ads.

It is plausible to assume that advertising literacy does not always have a negative impact on consumers' advertising skepticism and attitude toward ad. In fact, based on our results, advertising literacy appears capable of enhancing consumers' advertising skepticism while improving attitude toward ad. Thus, research on the effects of advertising literacy is not yet conclusive. More studies should delve into the effects of advertising literacy among different age groups. College students, far from being representative of the general population, may have a different level of advertising literacy, thus may have different perspectives on advertising skepticism and attitude toward ad.

In terms of the impact of advertising literacy on advertising value perception, the current study found that advertising literacy increases consumers' perceived value of advertising. Advertising literacy—defined as the skills and abilities to recognize, understand, analyze, interpret and evaluate advertising—has a positive impact on how consumers perceive advertising value.

In summary, the three hypotheses proposed herein were provided no support by the current study. However, findings suggest further research on impact of advertising literacy on advertising skepticism, attitude toward ad, and perceived advertising value. It would be worthwhile to examine how the level of individuals' advertising literacy has a differential impact on the effects these three factors. Due to recent developments in the media landscape, the lines between the commercial message and media content have blurred and consumers' advertising literacy is being challenged. Thus, advertising literacy education should be implemented for all ages.

The current study provides practical implications in areas of educational curricula development, advertising standards, and media literacy campaigns. In terms of educational curricula development, knowledge about advertising literacy levels among college students can help educators design relevant curricula to enhance students' critical thinking and awareness about advertisements. In terms of advertising standards, if college students show limited understanding of certain advertising tactics, it might indicate a need for clearer labeling or regulations regarding deceptive advertising practices. And lastly, in terms of media literacy campaigns, universities and colleges can launch media literacy campaigns, offering workshops or webinars to improve students' ability to critically analyze and interpret advertisements.

Further research directions are suggested in areas of demographic differences, comparison across educational levels, and impact of digital media. First, in terms of demographic differences, it would be interesting to investigate how advertising literacy varies across different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, cultural background) within the college student population. Second, in terms of comparison across educational levels, it will be worthwhile to extend the research to compare advertising literacy between high school students, college students, and postgraduate students to see how literacy develops over time. Finally, in terms of impact

of digital media, given the rise of social media and influencer marketing, it would be worthwhile to study how these platforms impact advertising literacy among college students.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] B. W. Wojdyski and N. J. Evans, "Going native: Effects of disclosure position and language on the recognition and evaluation of online native advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 157-168, 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2015.1115380>.
- [2] M. De Veirman, V. Cauberghe, and L. Hudders, "Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude," *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 798-828, 2017, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>.
- [3] W. J. Potter, *Media Literacy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2016.
- [4] L. Hudders, P. De Pauw, V. Cauberghe, K. Panic, B. Zarouali, and E. Rozendaal, "Shedding new light on how advertising literacy can affect children's processing of embedded advertising formats: A future research agenda," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 333-349, 2017, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1269303>.
- [5] E. Rozendaal, M. A. Lapierre, E. A. Van Reijmersdal, and M. Buijzen, "Reconsidering advertising literacy as a defense against advertising effects," *Media psychology*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 333-354, 2011, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2011.620540>.
- [6] M. Friestad and P. Wright, "The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 1-31, Jun. 1994, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/209380>.
- [7] E. Rozendaal, *Advertising literacy and children's susceptibility to advertising*, Thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2011.
- [8] C. Obermiller and E. R. Spangenberg, "Development of a scale to measure consumer skepticism toward advertising," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 159-186, 1998, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp0702\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp0702_03).
- [9] D. M. Hardesty, J. P. Carlson, and W. Bearden, "Brand familiarity and invoice price effects on consumer evaluations: the moderating role of skepticism toward advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 1-15, 2002, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2002.10673663>.
- [10] S. An, H. S. Jin, and E. H. Park, "Children's advertising literacy for advergames: Perception of the game as advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 63-72, 2014, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.795123>.
- [11] R. H. Ducoffe, "How consumers assess the value of advertising," *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1-18, 1995, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.1995.10505022>.
- [12] K. Logan, L. F. Bright, and H. Gangadharbatla, "Facebook versus television: advertising value perceptions among females," *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 164-179, 2012, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/17505931211274651>.
- [13] R. J. Lutz, "Affective and cognitive antecedents of attitude toward the ad: A conceptual framework," *Psychological process and advertising effects, Theory, Research, and Application*, pp. 45-63, 1985.
- [14] K. S. Burns, "Attitude toward the online ad format: a reexamination of the attitude toward the ad model in an online advertising context," Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 2003.
- [15] J. Y. Cho, "An Exploratory Study of Digital Advertising Literacy Components: Focusing on University Student Consumers' Perception," *Journal of Next-generation Convergence Technology Association*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 30-39, 2020.
- [16] L. A. Mohr, D. Eroğlu, and P. S. Ellen, "The development and testing of a measure of skepticism toward environmental claims in marketers' communications," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 30-55, 1998, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6606.1998.tb00399.x>.
- [17] C. Dianoux, Z. Linhart, and L. Vnoucková, "Attitude toward advertising in general and attitude toward a specific type of advertising-A first empirical approach," *Journal of Competitiveness*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 87-103, 2014, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2014.01.06>.
- [18] M. Buijzen and P. M. Valkenburg, "Parental mediation of undesired advertising effects," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 153-165, 2005, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4902\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4902_1).

- [19] A. I. Nathanson, "Mediation of children's television viewing: Working toward conceptual clarity and common understanding," *Annals of the International Communication Association*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 115-151, 2001, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2001.11679002>.
- [20] M. Buijzen, "Reducing children's susceptibility to commercials: Mechanisms of factual and evaluative advertising interventions," *Media Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 411-430, 2007, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701291361>.



© 2023 by the authors. Copyrights of all published papers are owned by the IJOC. They also follow the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.