

# Kid Youtubers in Spain and Their Practices as Toy Marketing Influencers on YouTube\*

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## SUMMARY

*This paper analyses the audio-visual content of the channels of Spanish child YouTubers in which the children interact with toys within a certain narrative to promote them and raise brand awareness without their audience identifying that content as advertising. The paper compares the data on the videos analysed during and outside the Christmas period, focusing on channels with the highest numbers of followers. The Spanish case is significant as it involves top influencers in the world in the toy sector, surpassing even the pioneering channels such as EvanTubeHD (USA). The authors viewed 250 channels and 3,633 minutes of*

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*content produced by the YouTubers most followed in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The paper lists the names of presented brands, the type of products advertised and the advertising formats used, as well as the marketing resources and potential breaches of advertising legislation by the content (in 97 % of cases). The conclusion is that this communication practice requires an in-depth review and analysis by various stakeholders who participate in it, including regulatory and legislative bodies. Besides, the authors have identified a need for further research that would contribute to describing the structure of those practices in a manner similar to this research. In addition, they highlight the importance of considering and identifying this content from the perspective of its persuasive nature, as the majority of the content analysed offered no visible or audible signs identifying it as such, thus contributing to adults and children perceiving it as the content of an informational or entertaining nature, rather than advertising.*

*Keywords:* YouTube, child influencers, legislation, advertising, entertainment, toy, children, regulation

## **Introduction and current status of research.**

### **Influencers, children and consumption of online content.**

According to the most recent data available in the United States, brands invested an average of 25,000 to 50,000 dollars in each advertising campaign featuring influencers (Linqia, 2018). In Spain, the studies on influencers (to date limited in number) state that 56% follow influencers through social networks, with the large majority being women (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2020), a figure which has fallen dramatically since 2018, when the figure was 72% (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018a and 2018b), although investment data in general are not included and much less so regarding children. Among young people (16-24 years old), the percentage of those following influencers was 77% in 2020 (IAB, 2020), with content generated by influencers being the preferred content for those aged under 18 (Wunderman Thomson, 2019). Children aged under 12 years old use the Internet from any device, as indicated in the work by García Jiménez, Tur-Viñes and Pastor Ruíz (2018), by Livingstone, Mascheroni and Staksrud (2015) and by Garmendia et al. (2016), as well as in the studies from the *Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación* (2018 and 2017) and Ofcom (2016 and 2019). The penultimate study (Ofcom, 2016) identifies that in the United Kingdom the consumption of content on YouTube by minors, either on the site itself or using the platform's app. Children are increasingly consuming digital media (Orús, 2020; Ofcom, 2019; PricewaterhouseCoopers International, 2019; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013) through their mobiles (95%); children

aged between 5 and 15 years old are those who spend most time consuming content online, viewing more than 15 hours per week (Anderson, 2018; Ofcom, 2020). This signals that children consume more content from YouTube than from television. Indeed, those aged between 8 and 11 favour watching YouTube (49%) over the television (14%), while older children aged between 12 and 15 years old also prefer YouTube (49%) to the television (16%) (Ofcom, 2019; Martínez-Pastor et al., 2020).

In Spain, the general media study *Estudio General de Medios* indicates that Internet access by children aged 4 to 13 years old from any device has increased by 64.2% since 2012. In this respect, 89% watch videos on the Internet and spend around 5 hours per day in front of a screen of some kind (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, 2017 and 2018). Although this points to the existence of a market niche for toy brands, the reality is that there is a lack of data about digital advertising and children, and defining the market aimed at them exactly is highly complex (the Spanish toy makers association -*Asociación Española de Fabricantes de Juguetes*-, Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Spain) and the association for self-regulation of commercial communication, *Autocontrol de la Publicidad*).

Most studies which focus on children and social networks in advertising content involve young people aged at least 14 years old, which is the age at which they can create accounts on social media (Tur-Viñes, Núñez Gómez & Martínez-Pastor, 2019; De Veirman, Hudders & Nelson, 2019; Ramos Serrano & Herrero-Díaz, 2016). It is from this age when children have a certain capacity to act due to their maturity.

### **Children and YouTubers: an advertising business model.**

However, studies relating to children aged under 14 as both content creators and content users are very few in number (Vizcaíno-Laorga, Martínez Pastor & Serrano Maíllo, 2019; Martínez, 2019; McRoberts, Bonsignore, Peyton & Yarosh, 2016; Yarosh, Bonsignore, McRoberts & Peyton, 2016) even though the emergence of children aged 12 who have their own YouTube channels is increasingly common; this is the case of Evan Snyder from the United States, better known on YouTube as EvanTubeHD. One of the pioneers, he began demonstrating toys in 2011 at the age of 8 years old, and has become quite professional, boasting nearby 7 million followers at the current time. He has three channels and works with Disney's Maker Studios. He has entered into agreements with numerous brand names, such as Toys "R" Us and is estimated to earn a million dollars per year (Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood et. al., 2015; Ramos Serrano & Herrero-Díaz, 2016). Evan led the field for years, but he is no longer the only leader.

In March 2015, another US child, Ryan, was aged just 4 years old when he began a channel (RyanToysReview), gaining 28.9 million followers since he and his parents

launched his main channel (Social Blade, 2021). The RyanToysReview channel was included on the Forbes list in 2018, when its protagonist was aged just 7 years old, thanks to revenues of 22 million dollars (Bergen, 2019). These outstanding examples of kidfluencer success have been followed by other children such as Vlad and Nikita, who as of 2020 had achieved 63.9 million subscribers (Social Blade, 2021).

Nowadays, the Spanish case is another global benchmark, as kid YouTubers (aged under 14) with toy-related channels hold the top positions in the absolute ranking in Social Blade (November 2018), beating EvanTubeHD. In Spain, channels such as Los Juguetes de Aranxa, CrazyHacks, Mikel Tube and Superdivertilandia have gained enough views to reach the minimum viewing numbers required by YouTube before it allows them to insert advertising (Giralt, 2016).

The research by DEFY Media Information in its Acumen report (2017) demonstrates that the best predictors of trends are teenagers and young people themselves aged 13 to 24. In fact, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (Interactive Advertising Bureau: *Estudio de Redes Sociales* (2020) specifies that, after the age of 16, the people and other influences which sway purchase decision processes are friends and relations, followed by comments on forums and blogs and, in third place, other young people's social media. Ramos Serrano and Herrero-Díaz (2016) maintain that young people are increasingly taking away from adults their power to influence and recommend, as children have replaced shopping decisions based on their parents' opinions with those based instead on their friends' opinions. This signals that children are increasingly influenced to make their purchases by other children. The IAB study identifies that from the age of 16 the most well-known social network is Facebook, followed by WhatsApp, Twitter and YouTube; the most highly valued are WhatsApp and YouTube; and the preferred social networks are WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018b; Garmendia et al., 2016). There are hardly any data or reports on children's consumption of content and influencers on social networks, child influencers and the brands that invest in these channels in Spain.

Another factor that shows the rise of this new YouTuber-based business is the emergence of new professional roles that have been generated inside the YouTubers' advertising ecosystem, which include: the social network platform; professional influencer agencies to represent the young YouTubers or to help brands find the influencers who best match their products; and the content creators and their managers, who tend to be their parents, in addition to the agencies. The YouTube platform is the means used to disseminate the videos created by the children. It possesses a specific channel called the "Creator Academy" (Google) and "Paid product placements and endorsements" (Google) where advice is given to new content creators, who are taught how to manage the advertising attached to their content (Autocon-

trol, 2019; Advertising Standards Authority, 2020; Federal Trade Commission, 2017). YouTube sets the rules of play, stipulating that videos must have been viewed at least 10,000 times before they can contain advertising, meaning that is the point when they can enter the business. For each 1,000 views, YouTube pays between 0.20 and 3.00 euros, depending on the demand for this type of profile in each channel for advertising placements and also on geographical area. In Spain, the average amount paid to a YouTube channel aimed at children is 1.82 euros in cost per thousand (cost per mille, CPM) (Sierra 2017). The children and their parents also have to adapt to the rules of this platform, becoming the creators and producers of the content. Additionally, the parents are managing a growing business in their role as their children's managers. Against this backdrop, agencies have also appeared which represent YouTubers and specialise in representing children, such as 2BKids (<http://www.2bkids.com>); at the same time, they offer brands the greatest profitability for their adverts by seeking out YouTubers who are the best fit for the brand's products.

Brands are opting for children who are on YouTube, which is a medium of expression and entertainment in which the children develop numerous skills, which some market and others do not (Lange, 2014). YouTube is a format used by children to take their first steps, as amateurs and pre-professionals, as content creators. In fact, the children develop skills such as those of camera operator, video text copywriter, actor, editor and video producer (Lange, 2014; Yarosh, Bonsignore, McRoberts & Peyton, 2016). A strong bond of trust is generated between kid YouTubers and those that consume their content (Westenberg, 2016). In fact, users trust the opinions of YouTubers more than they do any brand, generating enormous electronic word of mouth (eWOM) among their peers (Global Web Index, 2020; Lange, 2014). Children who go online enjoy the entertainment content, but not necessarily in order to consume the products featured; however, brands take advantage of their enjoyment to seduce or persuade them through the influencers and thereby sway their subsequent shopping processes (Goldate, 1997; Marsh, 2015) as the children, by imitation, could be influenced to purchase what has been mentioned by their favourite YouTubers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

As regards the perception of advertising in the YouTubers' channels, the report *Informe Acumen* (Defy Media, 2016) states that children see adverts on digital media differently to television adverts. While television adverts interrupt their entertainment, on digital media children consider these advertising spaces to be inspiring and necessary for their favoured YouTubers to earn a living. The type of advertising format children prefer consists of entertaining messages which are highly exciting, surprising and interactive (Ipsos/Google, 2012). In fact, the formats most commonly used by YouTubers and accepted by their followers are: subscription, unboxing,

sponsorship, promoted content, affiliate links, “See More” and product testing (Federal Trade Commission, 2017; Wu, 2016; Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018a and 2018b). The purpose of subscription is to obtain more followers; unboxing involves unpacking a toy and explaining what it consists of; sponsorship is when a brand sponsors a video; promoted content is publishing content featuring the brand in exchange for remuneration; affiliated links are found in content which contains links where you can see and purchase the products shown in the video; the “See More” link is to see everything contained in the box that appears in the video; and product-testing videos are those where the products gifted by the brands are used and demonstrated.

## **Objectives, hypothesis, methodology and sample**

The research presented in this paper is exploratory and descriptive, as there is currently limited knowledge at international level about the presence of advertising and its degree of compliance in channels featuring children (Craig & Cunningham, 2017; Araújo et al., 2017; Chester, 2015; Marsh, 2015; Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood et. al., 2015).

- The main objective of this research is therefore to find out how the presence of products and brands arises in kid YouTuber channels (children aged under 14) focusing on toys and to determine the extent of compliance with the legislation, based on the presence of advertising elements and the presence/absence of explicit advertising identifiers, which are required by law.

As secondary objectives, the aim is to:

- Determine the manner in which brands and products are present in the channels.
- Detect in the videos the main type of products typical of the channel (types of toys) as well as other categories besides the toys themselves.
- Identify the main advertising formats used.
- Detect the advertising techniques used to promote the brands and self-promote their channels through typical marketing tools.
- Recognise whether these videos are clearly identified as being advertising through visual or audible signs.

A methodological objective of this study is to create a list ranking the kid YouTubers with the most followers in Spain. To achieve this aim, 250 channels were viewed in order to identify those to be included in the study (YouTubers aged under 14, channels devoted to toys).

To meet these objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

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Table 1. Main kid YouTubers devoted to toys.  
Ranking of the total number of Spanish YouTubers.

*Tablica 1. Glavna djeca Youtuberi posvećeni igračkama.  
Poredak ukupnog broja španjolskih Youtubera.*

<i>YouTuber</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>No. in Ranking</i>	<i>Subscribers</i>	<i>Views</i>	<i>Start date</i>	<i>Frequency of weekly uploading of videos</i>	<i>Age at which they begin the channel (yrs)</i>
Mikel Tube	A	9	1,556,846	961,370,286	August 2015	3	6 4
Los juguetes de Arantxa	A-	29	1,800,079	686,658,181	January 2015	3	6
Superdivertilandia	B+	46	1,417,622	873,376,669	May 2014	3	< 12
TheCrazyHaacks	B+	48	2,103,041	731,609,222	March 2015	3	<12
Jugando con Aby	B+	64	824.657	225,354,441	December 2015	< 2	<12
Los mundos de Nico	B	215	686.036	144,335,558	November 2013	3	<12
AbreloToy	B	250+	686.954	208,059,210	April 2015	3	<12
Juega con Clodette	B+	250+	1,090,386	233,555,815	December 2016	3	8
Planeta Anibal	B-	250+	33.359	7,220,472	October 2015	< 2	< 12

Source: Authors' compilation based on Social Blade with data as at October 2017.

H1. In Spain, there are channels featuring children that incorporate information about toy products and brands into the video content with the purpose of promoting or advertising said products and brands.

H2. The toy brands and products appearing in the videos of kid YouTubers are integrated into the content and do not appear clearly identified as advertising.

H3. It is common to find numerous advertising formats such as product testing and unboxing, among others, integrated into a video inside entertainment content.

To select the sample, the top 250 channels on the Social Blade ranking were viewed (criterion for inclusion: Country – Spain). In addition, a panel of experts from advertising agencies were involved to identify other possible channels. From this point, the following inclusion criteria were applied: channels featuring children aged under 14, devoted to toys, and with over 10,000 visits.

The initial time period selected covered the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Christmas periods, from December of the earlier year until January of the following year coinciding with the Christmas period (please note that in Spain, traditionally, Christmas gifts brought by the three Wise Men, or Kings, are overwhelmingly received on 6 January). A second period was added, consisting of October to November of the earlier year and February to March of the following year, in order to see if there are any differences between the Christmas period and the rest of the year in these channels. Thus, the sample is made up of 183 videos, which represent 3,633 minutes of viewing, from two periods - one consisting of the Christmas period of 1 December to 7 January (in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018), owing to the large volume of toys advertised, and another consisting of the period covering October to November and February to March (in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018).

The analysis procedure selected was conducted using a randomised block experimental design. The size of the sample was determined by taking into account the division into two groups of the population under investigation according to the frequency of the videos uploaded on a weekly basis. The first group is made up of channels with a frequency of three or more videos uploaded to YouTube each week and the second group is made up of channels with a frequency of between one and two uploaded videos per week. For each group, a random selection was made from each channel of a sample of 3-5 videos uploaded between the months of October and March during the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. The total sample for analysis consists of 183 videos.

Content analysis was performed using our own analysis protocol based on Nansen and Nicoll (2017) and Martínez and Nicolás (2016). The following elements were analysed:

1. **The presence of trade marks and products** in the videos, in the video title, in the thumbnail or cover image, as an overlay or verbalised during the video.
2. **The category of the product** appearing on these channels in accordance with the Infodex classification (2018), making particular reference to the different toy categories: large vehicles, scale-model vehicles, construction, action figures, educational, electronic toys, theatre, board games, dolls and accessories, movies, animal, imitation of the home, musical instruments, sports toys, other figures and accessories, retail brands, beauty, crafts and other (Martínez & Nicolás, 2016).

Table 2. Design of the sample adjusted with regard to Table 1 following consultation and verification with the panel of experts.

*Tablica 2. Dizajn uzorka prilagođen tablici 1 nakon savjetovanja i provjere sa stručnom komisijom*

	<b>YOUTUBER/CHANNEL (2017-2018)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Total percentage</b>
1.	Abrelotoys	20	11%
2.	Lady Pecas / Aventurasmágicas	20	11%
3.	Jugando con Aby	27	15%
4.	Los juguetes de Arantxa	19	10%
5.	Los Mundos de Nico	20	11%
6.	MikelTube	21	11%
7.	Planeta Anibal	16	9%
8.	Superdivertilandia	20	11%
9.	TheCrazyHaacks	20	11%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Authors' compilation.

3. **Advertising formats.** Possible advertising formats which appear in the video, such as unboxing, sponsorship, promoted content, product testing, affiliate links, likes and “see more” (Wu, 2016; Federal Trade Commission, 2017)
4. **Other marketing resources.** Identifiable elements that can give rise to the interpretation that it is a business: a. link to an online store; b. email address for sales queries; c. the YouTuber’s own name and graphic expression; d. presence of the term “subscribe”; e. identifying their own online store or link to another selling platform (Wu, 2016; Federal Trade Commission, 2017, 2019, 2020).
5. **Identifying advertising.** Are the trade marks and products clearly identified as being advertising content? Are they differentiated from other entertainment content through a text or audible element? This aspect takes into account the General Advertising Act 34/1988, of 11 November; the Unfair Competition Act 3/1991, of 10 January; the General Audiovisual Communication Act 7/2010, of 31 March; the Toy Advertising Selfregulation Code.

## Analysis and results

### Presence of brands and products

Most of the videos analysed (74%) include the presence of a single identified brand (Table 3) in the different spaces (Table 4). However, in relation to the products, only

50% of the videos feature a single product (as it is common to find videos where several products from the same brand are shown as complements to a single product or to complete the game mentioned in the video). In exceptional cases, more than 30 brands (1%) or more than 40 products (1%) have been recorded in a single video. Th, as can be seen in Table 4, is the result of special videos posted during the Christmas period.

Table 3. Number of videos and their relationship to the number of brands and products advertised in each video.

*Tablica 3. Broj videozapisa i njihov odnos prema broju marki i proizvoda koji se oglašavaju u svakom videozapisu.*

NUMBER OF BRANDS ADVERTISED				NUMBER OF PRODUCTS ADVERTISED			
Number of brands	Cases	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Number products	Cases	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0	3	1.6	1.6	0	4	2.2	2.2
1	136	73.9	76.4	1	92	50.0	52.7
2	19	10.3	86.8	2	35	19.0	72.0
3	6	3.3	90.1	3	17	9.2	81.3
4	3	1.6	91.8	4	5	2.7	84.1
5	3	1.6	93.4	5	9	4.9	89.0
6	4	2.2	95.6	6	7	3.8	92.9
7	2	1.1	96.7	7	2	1.1	94.0
8	1	0.5	97.3	9	2	1.1	95.1
9	1	0.5	97.8	10	4	2.2	97.3
11	1	0.5	98.4	16	1	0.5	97.8
12	1	0.5	98.9	17	1	0.5	98.4
35	1	0.5	99.5	18	1	0.5	98.9
38	1	0.5	100.0	38	1	0.5	99.5
				42	1	0.5	100.0

Source: Authors' compilation

The presence of products and brands during and outside the Christmas shopping period demonstrates certain differences (Table 4): outside the Christmas period, 84% of the videos analysed advertise a single brand and 56% focus on advertising a single product, whereas during the Christmas period these figures fall to 66% and 45.5% respectively. The chi-squared test has been used to study any possible differences in the number of products and brands advertised during and outside the

Christmas period. It has been found that there are significant differences in the number of brands advertised (p-value 0.001) and the number of products (p-value 0.035) during and outside the Christmas period, so that at Christmas the number of videos advertising more than one product and including more than one brand increases, with extreme figures of up to 12 brands advertised and over 38 products advertised. This is because over Christmas YouTubers make special videos for the day after the gifts from Father Christmas and/or the three Wise Men, or in the New Year's Eve special.

Table 4. Differences between periods. Number of videos and their relationship to the number of brands and products advertised in each video.

*Tablica 4. Razlike između razdoblja. Broj videozapisa i njihov odnos prema broju marki i proizvoda koji se oglašavaju u svakom videozapisu.*

NON-CHRISTMAS PERIOD: OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/FEBRUARY/ MARCH (2016-2017-2018)				CHRISTMAS PERIOD: FROM 22 DECEMBER TO 7 JANUARY (2016-2017-2018)			
Number of brands advertised	Percentage	Number of products advertised	Percentage	Number of brands advertised	Percentage	Number of products advertised	Percentage
0	0%	0	4%	0	3%	0	1%
1	84%	1	56%	1	66%	1	45.5%
2	10%	2	15%	2	11%	2	23%
3	2.5%	3	11%	3	4%	3	8%
4	1.3%	4	2.5%	4	2%	4	3%
6	2.5%	5	4%	5	3%	5	6%
		6	4%	6	2%	6	4%
		9	1%	7	2%	7	2%
		10	2.5%	8	1%	9	1%
				12	1%	16	1%
						17	1%
						18	1%
						+38	2%

Source: Authors' compilation.

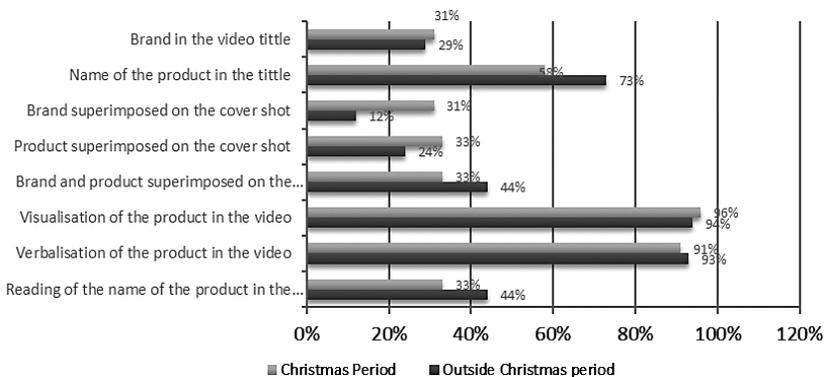
The presence in different locations of the brands and products in the videos (Table 5) was analysed in order to detect evidence of the presence of advertising.

Most commonly, the product appears in the title of the video (64% of cases), whereas the brand does so in 30% of cases. In practically all the cases (96.5%) the name

Table 5. Presence of identifiers for the product and the brand.  
 Tablica 5. Prisutnost identifikatora proizvoda i marke.

IDENTIFIER		N	%
Can the name of the brand be read in the title?	Yes	55	30.2%
	No	127	69.8%
Can the name of the product be read in the title?	Yes	116	64.4%
	No	64	35.6%
Can the name of the brand be seen/read superimposed in the video?	Yes	43	24.3%
	No	134	75.7%
Can the name of the brands or products in the initial title of the video be read/seen superimposed?	Brand only	17	9.7%
	Product only	52	29.5%
	Both	69	39.2%
	None	38	21.6%
Can the name of the product be seen/read superimposed in the video?	Yes	69	39.0%
	No	108	61.0%
Can the product be seen superimposed in the video?	Yes	169	96.5%
	No	8	4.5%
Is the name of the product verbalised in the video?	Yes	159	91.9%
	No	14	8.1%

Source: Authors' compilation



Graph 1. Strategies for the presence of brands and products.  
 Grafikon 1. Strategije za prisutnost marki i proizvoda.

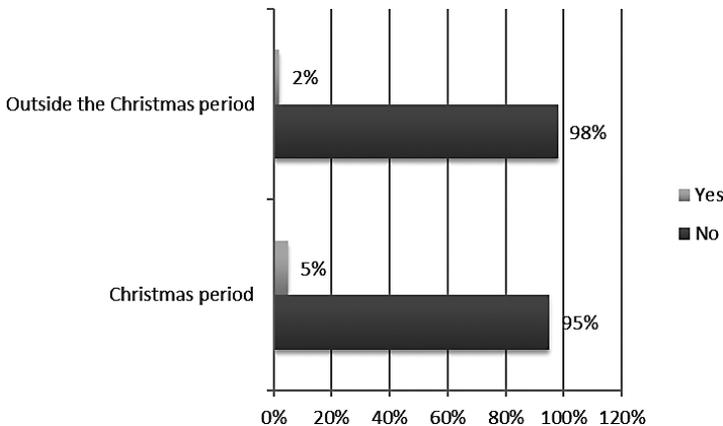
Source: Authors' compilation

of the product is superimposed when the product appears in the video. Besides certain nuances that can be noticed between the Christmas and non-Christmas period if these data are separated (Table 6), a relevant point is that the presence of the product or brand occurs explicitly and in a reinforced manner both at special times (Christmas) and during the rest of the year (Graph 1). There are not significant differences during and outside the Christmas period when the brand (p-value 0.912) or the product (p-value 0.436) appears in the title of the video. Therefore, it is not the Christmas period (which it could be due to its exceptional nature) which explains the general behaviour of the data. The presence of brands and products with different strategies is a fact.

### Identifying the advertising

According to the Spanish General Advertising Act 34/1988, of 11 November, Unfair Competition Act 3/1991, of 10 January, and General Audiovisual Communication Act 7/2010, of 31 March, as well as the Toy Advertising Self-regulation Code from *Autocontrol de la Publicidad*, brands and products in videos are required to be clearly identified as advertising content either through a text resource or using a sound resource.

However, despite the clear presence of brands and products in the titles of the videos, in the video cover image and superimposed during the videos, it is striking that it is only indicated (verbally or visually) that the videos consist of advertising con-



Graph 2. Identifying the advertising.  
Grafikon 2. Identificiranje oglašavanja.

Source: Authors' compilation

tent in 2% of cases over Christmas and in 5% of those outside this period. That is, in between 95% and 98% of the cases the advertising nature of the videos is not disclosed, when in the videos themselves the presence of the brand and/or product is evident in close-ups and the brand and products are strategically positioned throughout the video. This would be inconceivable in any other medium, such as television, where any commercial must identify its advertising status separately from any other entertainment content. In fact, it must be disclosed that it is advertising by using a superimposed statement or using a sound that makes clear to the minor that it is a different block to the entertainment section. However, in the social channels analysed it appears this is not being adhered to and this practice is not reported as would be done almost *ex officio* by numerous consumer associations in traditional media (Graph 2).

### **Product category**

This work analyses videos which publicise products from the toy category; therefore, the selection was made based on this criterion. However, the analysis has been designed to identify if this type of video includes products classified in other categories, besides toys. An Infoadex (2018) classification adapted for this study has been followed and a maximum of six product categories per video were identified, thus making it possible to analyse the data more precisely. Video games, food, leisure, fashion and sporting articles are the products recurring the most, and represent 30% of the cases (Table 6).

Table 6. List of product categories analysed.  
*Tablica 6. Popis analiziranih kategorija proizvoda.*

<b>Product category</b>	<b>Number of cases identified</b>	<b>% of the total number of videos analysed</b>
Food	12	7%
Sporting articles	4	2%
Textiles and clothing	11	6%
Music	0	0%
Free time-Leisure parks	12	7%
Consoles and games	14	8%

Source: Authors' compilation

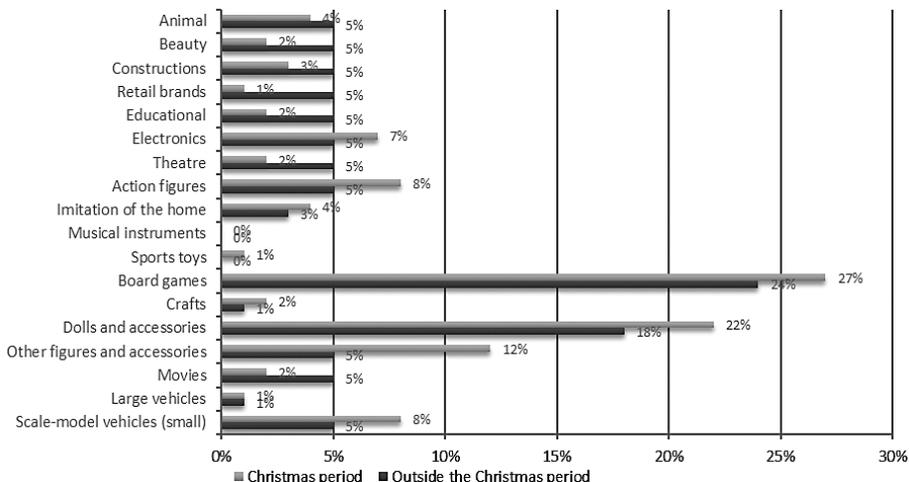
We found the following results for the toy categories identified. The toys appearing most frequently with respect to the total number of videos are board games, toys and accessories, other figures and accessories, scale-model vehicles, action figures and constructions (see Table 7).

Table 7. List of product categories identified.  
*Tablica 7. Popis identificiranih kategorija proizvoda.*

<b>Toy categories</b>	<b>%</b>
Animals	4%
Beauty	3%
Construction	6%
Retail brands	1%
Educational	1%
Electronic	7%
Theatre	1%
Action figures	8%
Imitation of the home	4%
Musical instruments	0%
Sports toys	1%
Board games	32%
Crafts	2%
Dolls and accessories	26%
Other figures and accessories	11%
Movies	4%
Large vehicles	1%
Scale-model vehicles (small)	8%

Source: Authors' compilation.

If we dissect these data and compare them between the two periods analysed (see Graph 3), the most striking differences are a lesser presence of board games (24%), as with dolls and accessories (18%) and other figures and accessories (5%), while constructions increases (7.5%), outside the Christmas period. Other variations occur in the beauty and movies categories, which are present more frequently outside the Christmas period, although, conversely, animal, educational, imitation of the home and scale-model vehicles are present more frequently during the Christmas



Graph 3. Product category: toys compared according to period.  
 Grafikon 3. Kategorija proizvoda: igračke u usporedbi s razdobljem.

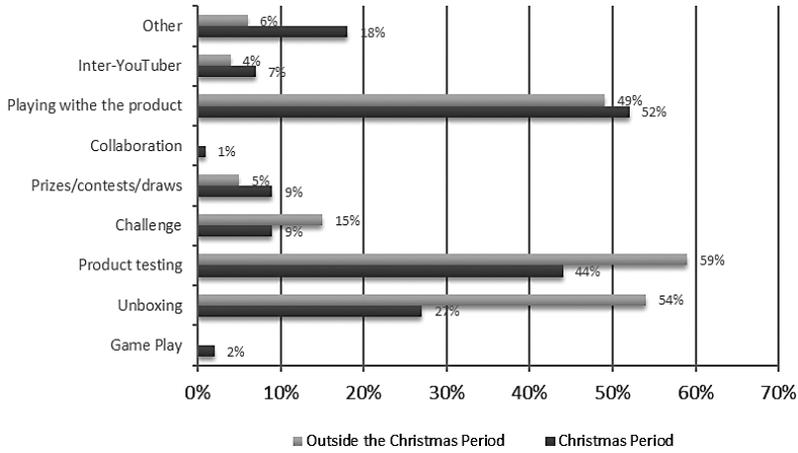
Source: Authors' compilation

period. These variations are statistically significant (p-value 0.00001) during and outside the Christmas period.

### Advertising formats and other persuasive resources

Based on the Federal Trade Commission (2017), Wu (2016), and Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood et al. (2015), we have identified nine advertising formats (Graph 4). The formats preferred by the channels analysed are playing with the product (51%), testing the product (50%), unboxing (38%) and challenge (11%). The least used formats have been game play (1%), collaboration (1%), inter-YouTubers (5%) and prizes/contests/draws (7%). It is important to highlight that these formats can be present in multiple form, meaning that a single video can contain more than one type. These formats are understood to be the most used as they show in the clearest manner the characteristics of the product advertised, and kid YouTubers interact more directly with their peers when playing and making up stories with the toy. On the other hand, challenges and prizes generate direct and dynamic interaction with children. In this respect, it has been detected that personal data is requested from the minors without the corresponding legal precautions. If we compare the use of the formats according to period, we identify that the clearest differences are found in unboxing, product testing and challenge formats, whose presence

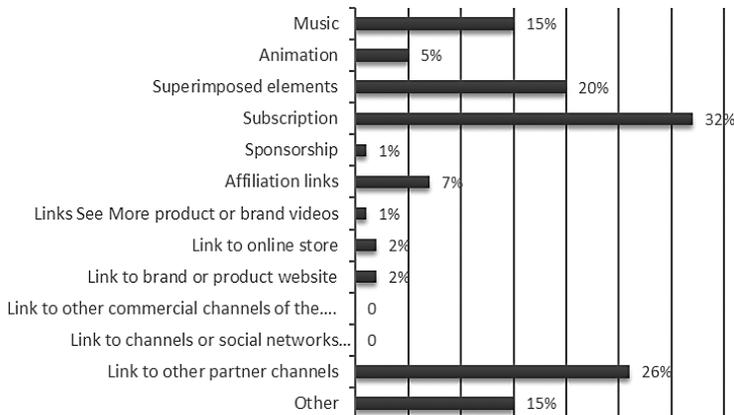
## Kid Youtubers in Spain and Their Practices as Toy Marketing Influencers on YouTube



Graph 4. Advertising formats compared between periods.  
*Grafikon 4. Usporedba formata oglašavanja u različitim periodima.*

Source: Authors' compilation

outside the Christmas period is significantly higher and in the inter-YouTuber and prize/contest/draw formats, which are significantly more frequently present during the Christmas period, whereas playing with the product has similar data for presence and high frequency in both periods (Graph 4).



Graph 5. Marketing resources.  
*Grafikon 5. Marketinški resursi.*

Source: Authors' compilation

## **Marketing resources**

Together with these formats, we find that 98% of the cases resort to the use of marketing resources to promote a brand or product (Graph 5). The resources most resorted to are: 1) subscription to the channel, present in 58% of the videos; 2) link to other partner channels, used in 48% of the videos; 3) superimposed elements, used in 34% of the videos; and 4) music, used in 28% of the videos (Graph 6). Together with these resources, others have been identified such as the use of still shots of products, use of green screen, and videos set to music and sung by the individuals featured.

If we compare the use of these resources between the analysed periods, we find that there are certain differences between Christmas and the rest of the year. Music doubles its presence as a marketing resource at Christmas (35%) whereas using subscriptions and resorting to an affiliate link is halved during this period.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

### **Unidentified advertising**

Our analysis of the data collected leads us to conclude that there is currently a consolidated practice involving children and media, advertisers and parents which we can classify as advertising activity but is not however demarcated as such in the videos as laid down in current legislation (Autocontrol, 2019; Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018; Advertising Standards Authority, 2020; Lievens, 2010; Lievens, Dumortier & Ryan, 2006; McLaughlin, 2013; Staksrud, 2013).

In this context, this paper concludes that, as regards H1 - which states that in Spain there are video channels located on the YouTube platform featuring children, called kid YouTubers on their own channels, who include among their content videos about toy products which aim to promote or publicise said products - the hypothesis is confirmed. These channels have a very high number of videos, spread across different sections, whose purpose is constant marketing and which are however presented in the form of entertainment. Of the 183 videos analysed, 98% include at least one product and/or one brand. These videos are integrated into the carousel of videos of the YouTube channel, as stated in H2 - which suggests that the toy brands and products appearing in the videos of kid YouTubers are integrated into the content and do not appear clearly identified as advertising, neither in the text of the title of the advert nor in the video itself with close ups, and the interaction with the influencers is direct - thus most of this content is not identified as advertising and demarcated from the rest of the content.

### **Advertising integrated as part of the content**

As regards the ways of integrating the brands and products into the analysed content, the results show us that there are several different modes (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018a; Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2020; Araújo et al., 2017). The most notable include the presence of the name of the product in the title presenting the videos; a title featuring brand names is less common. In turn, the use of cover images by way of presentation in the videos is very common. These cover images serve to identify the specific products and brands of each video upon them being included on carousels where they are located and arranged by topic and seasonal nature. These cover images contain infographics and photographs of toys and their brands which means they stand out in the initial image of the video which is used as the backdrop of the cover images. In addition, both the brand and the product are verbalised on different occasions by the YouTuber. On other occasions, an amplified image of the YouTuber next to the product is used and in one of the margins an oversized brand logo is featured in a superimposed manner. It has also been verified that in this type of video the narrative is subject to the kid YouTuber's interaction with the toy, which is shown in different shots, many of which are close-ups at the beginning of the video where the toy is presented in the greatest detail. However, as has been detected, 97% of the videos analysed do not disclose it is advertising when, as demonstrated by the analysed evidence, such videos should be deemed by the authorities and by the YouTube channel to be content of an advertising nature and not merely entertainment videos.

### **Advertising formats as a reinforcing element in the integration with the information or leisure content**

Finally, as regards H3, which stated that it is common to find numerous advertising formats such as product testing and unboxing, among others, integrated into a video inside entertainment content, the study has demonstrated that all the videos analysed contained some type of specific format which was repeated among the various YouTubers (Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood et al., 2015).

The use of this type of formats is a further demonstration of the advertising intent of the video. In this manner, brand, product and YouTubers can choose from a range of formats which are familiar or recognised among a child audience, making it more difficult for that audience to identify the content as being of a commercial and intentional nature.

### **Presence of persuasive resources**

These formats are accompanied by persuasive and marketing resources which are present in the majority of the videos, such as the notably more frequent use of music during the Christmas period compared to the rest of the year. It is also common for these videos to invite viewers to join or become subscribers to the channel, as growing subscriber numbers increases both the commercial value of the channel and the brands' interest in including their products in the videos (CCDDCCFC, 2015). Moreover, the use of music as a persuasive resource is a good indicator that the channel is positioning itself as a clear commercial product, as music is also of interest to children, but probably for another age range; furthermore, there are already channels exclusively for music and therefore it is not of (commercial) interest on a toy channel.

### **Products different to the channel's typical content**

The presence of products other than the toys themselves (such as food, sporting articles, clothing, leisure parks, which amount to 22%) or such as video consoles and games (8%) are an indicator of the advertising pressure for those products to be on a channel for which they are not typical (although they are due to the target audience, which means the channel is deemed to be an advertising medium and not merely an informative product).

### **Strategy of the channel related to the commercial planning by businesses**

In general terms, and out of the total number of videos, the predominant products are board games (32%) and dolls and accessories (26%). However, during the Christmas period the trend changes, as priority is given to toys aimed at boys and family games compared to the rest of the year, where the star toys are dolls. We understand these to be strategies from brands which, taking advantage of the Christmas period, plan their strategic advertising campaigns in traditional media and now in social networks such as YouTube (see Graph 2). Therefore, the strategy of the channel seems to be marked out by the marketing planning of the toy companies.

### **New trends on YouTube compared to traditional media**

Linked to the previous conclusion, if the results obtained are compared to prior studies (Martínez & Nicolás, 2016; Martínez, Nicolás & Salas, 2013) the conclusion can be drawn that at Christmas there is a change in the target audience. The aforementioned studies demonstrated that the predominant toys were dolls, whereas

currently the toys with the greatest presence during the Christmas period are those aimed at the male gender.

This issue is of great interest both for the advertising industry and for consumers due to the ample business it has been generating and the obligation, required by legislation, to inform the consumer that these activities represent advertising content. Proof of this are the self-regulation codes in the advertising sector, such as the “Libro Blanco sobre Marketing de influencers” (IAB España, 2019) and the IAB’s UK guide, “Recognition of advertising: online marketing to children under 12” (Advertising Standards Authority, 2017), which aims to generate good advertising practices. In this respect, the first complaints have already been received from consumers about infringements of these rules, such as the complaint made by the Truth in Advertising consumers association (2019) and filed with the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) against the Ryan ToysReview channel for not differentiating its advertising content from its entertainment content, thus causing confusion among children about the nature of the content they are consuming.

In turn, the FTC published the “Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Rohit Chopra” (2019) so that children are safeguarded from the business of content creators. The YouTube platform has itself created a video which warns content creators they must clearly include an indicative text or sound if the content includes advertising. It also plans to change its policy in January 2020 relating to channels whose content is aimed at children to prevent behavioural advertising in said channels, which would represent a 60% to 90% (2019) decrease in revenue, with fines of up to 42,000 dollars per video, thus following the guidelines from the FTC pursuant to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). This situation restricts both the future activity of this market and the continuity of the lines of research proposed in this paper. We believe that, in view of the new panorama as of 2020, it is necessary to continue analysing how this industry adapts to the new regulations and how the formats and practices explained in this study evolve, change or disappear in its relations with children.

Finally, it is essential to continue this research and the methodology used in this study to evaluate the evolution of these advertising formats and how they are related to children in their twofold relationship with them, that is, as producers and consumers. Recording and posting content on channels such as YouTube is already a daily recreational practice among many children in Spain. However, the commercialisation of the content and the professionalism of this activity requires, as the results of this study indicate, special and continued interest to be taken by a number of stakeholders. Work such as this study makes it possible to gain a greater understanding of the structure and guidelines which, as has been demonstrated, define a professional advertising activity in which children are playing a leading role.

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# Djeca-influenceri na YouTubeu u Španjolskoj i njihovo sudjelovanje u promoviranju igračaka

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## SAŽETAK

*U radu se analizira audiovizualni sadržaj na kanalima djece youtubera iz Španjolske u kojima djeca u okviru određenog narativa stupaju u interakciju s igračkama radi njihova promoviranja i podizanja prepoznatljivosti robnih marki, a da publika pritom taj sadržaj ne prepoznaje kao oglašavanje. U radu se uspoređuju podaci iz videozapisa analiziranih tijekom i oko božićnih blagdana na kanalima s najvećim brojem pratitelja. Slučaj iz Španjolske važan je jer u industriji igračaka postoje vrhunski svjetski influenceri koji su čak poznatiji od začetnika trenda, npr. kanala EvanTubeHD (SAD). Pregledano je 250 kanala i 3633 minute sadržaja koji su producirali najpraćeniji youtuberi u 2016., 2017. i 2018. godini. Rad također sadrži nazive predstavljenih robnih marki, vrstu reklamiranih proizvoda i korištene oblike oglašavanja, kao i marketinške resurse te moguće prekršaje propisa kojima se regulira oglašavanje prema sadržaju (u 97 % slučajeva). Zaključeno je da takav vid komunikacijske prakse zahtijeva iscrpno preispitivanje i analizu različitih dionika, uključujući regulativna i zakonodavna tijela. Osim toga, istaknuta je potreba za istraživanjima koja, kao i ovaj rad, doprinose opisivanju strukture takvih praksi. Nadalje, naglašena je važnost razmatranja i prepoznavanja sadržaja na temelju njihove moći uvjerenja jer u većini analiziranog sadržaja nije bilo nikakvog vizualnog ili zvučnog signala koji je označavao da je riječ o oglašavanju, stoga su ga odrasli i djeca doživljavali kao sadržaj informativne ili zabavne prirode.*

*Ključne riječi:* YouTube, djeca influenceri, zakonodavstvo, oglašavanje, zabava, igračka, djeca, propisi