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**Master in Marketing Management Title:**

**Children's Perceptions and Attitudes towards Targeted Advertising: A Qualitative  
Study in a suburban area "Oued Endja" - Algeria**

**Elaborated by**

Zabat nada

**Supervised by:**

PR. Messaoud ZEROUTI

**President of the jury**

PR. BELAIDI Ali

**Examinator**

DR. MOHAMADI Nedjela

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## ABSTRACT

The shift to online marketing has heightened ethical concerns about children's privacy and health, the dilemma of having the right to be present online while being protected from unethical exploitation presents an urgent problem to address, especially with the rapid growth and advancement the sector witnessed within the past years, This study explores children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising in the suburban area of “Oued Endja” -Mila- Algeria, addressing a significant gap in the existing research. Utilizing a qualitative approach, six focus group discussions were conducted with children aged 8 to 14 years. Thematic analysis of the discussions revealed varied levels of advertising literacy among the participants, with some children displaying a basic understanding of advertising intent, however the majority lacked awareness regarding privacy issues associated with targeted advertising. These findings suggest the urgent need for educational initiatives to enhance advertising literacy and privacy awareness among children. Additionally, the insights gained from this study can inform consumer protection organizations, such as the Algerian Organization for Consumer Protection (APOCE), in developing more effective strategies to safeguard children's interests in online environment.

**Keywords: Children’s perception; online profiling; targeted advertisements; online privacy; marketing to children.**

## Résumé

La transition vers le marketing en ligne a accru les préoccupations éthiques concernant la vie privée et la santé des enfants. Le dilemme d'avoir le droit d'être présent en ligne tout en étant protégé contre l'exploitation non éthique présente un problème urgent à résoudre, surtout avec la croissance rapide et l'avancement que le secteur a connus au cours des dernières années. Cette étude explore les perceptions et attitudes des enfants à l'égard de la publicité ciblée dans la banlieue de "Oued Endja" - Mila - Algérie, comblant ainsi une lacune importante dans la recherche existante. En utilisant une approche qualitative, six discussions de groupe ont été menées avec des enfants âgés de 8 à 14 ans. L'analyse thématique des discussions a révélé des niveaux variables de littératie publicitaire parmi les participants, certains enfants ayant une compréhension de base de l'intention publicitaire, tandis que la majorité manquait de conscience des problèmes de confidentialité associés à la publicité ciblée. Ces résultats suggèrent le besoin urgent d'initiatives éducatives pour améliorer la littératie publicitaire et la sensibilisation à la confidentialité parmi les enfants. De plus, les idées tirées de cette étude peuvent informer les organisations de protection des consommateurs, telles que l'Organisation algérienne de protection des consommateurs (APOCE), dans le développement de stratégies plus efficaces pour protéger les intérêts des enfants dans l'environnement en ligne.

**Mots-clés : Perception des enfants ; profilage en ligne ; publicités ciblées ; confidentialité en ligne ; marketing envers les enfants.**

## ملخص

تزايدت المخاوف الأخلاقية حول خصوصية الأطفال وصحتهم مع الانتقال إلى التسويق الإلكتروني، وتعتبر مشكلة حق الكيان الإلكتروني للأطفال بين الحق في الوجود عبر الإنترنت وحقهم في الحماية من الاستغلال الغير الأخلاقي مسألة عاجلة تحتاج إلى حل، خاصة مع النمو السريع والتطور الذي شهده هذا القطاع في السنوات الأخيرة. هذه دراسة استكشافية لتصورات و اعتقادات الأطفال ومواقفهم تجاه الإعلانات المستهدفة في منطقة وادي النجاء في الجزائر، متطرفة لظاهرة قلت الابحاث المعالجة لها في النطاق الجزائري. باستخدام منهج نوعي، تم جمع البيانات عن طريق ستة مجموعات تركيز مع أطفال تتراوح أعمارهم بين 8 إلى 14 عامًا. كشف التحليل الموضوعي للمناقشات عن مستويات متفاوتة من معرفة الإعلانات بين المشاركين، حيث أظهر بعض الأطفال فهمًا أساسيًا لنوايا الإعلان، الا ان معظم المشاركين افتقر إلى الوعي بمسائل الخصوصية المرتبطة بالإعلانات المستهدفة. تشير هذه النتائج إلى الحاجة الملحة إلى مبادرات تعليمية لتعزيز معرفة الأطفال بالإعلانات وزيادة وعيهم بسياسات الخصوصية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يمكن للدراسة ان تفيد منظمات حماية المستهلك، مثل المنظمة الجزائرية لحماية المستهلك (APOCE)، في تكثيف الجهود لتطوير استراتيجيات أكثر فعالية لحماية مصالح الأطفال في البيئة الرقمية.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تصورات الأطفال؛ التمييز على الإنترنت؛ الإعلانات المستهدفة؛ الخصوصية على الإنترنت؛ التسويق للأطفال.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

**AD** - Advertisement

**OBA** - Online Behavioral Advertising

**APOCE** - Algerian Organization for Consumer Protection and Guidance

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organization

**FGD** - Focus Group Discussion

**COPPA** - Children's Online Privacy Protection Act

**GDPR** - General Data Protection Regulation

**CARU** - Children's Advertising Review Unit

**UNICEF** - United Nations Children's Fund

**WHO** - World Health Organization

**UNCRC** - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

This first section of the paper will provide an overview of the overall research with the aim to place the study within context, and address the specific elements of the topic that will be addressed, building upon existing literature and stating the research problem, moreover the structure of the main chapters will be outlined to give the reader an idea of how each section will contribute to the end purpose of the study.

### **1. Research context and objectives:**

One of the most significant current discussions in legal and moral philosophy is marketing ethics. In the literature, the term Marketing Ethics encompasses the rules, guidelines, and standards in which marketing actions are regulated to fit within the norms of what is right against what is wrong (Sayil, 2018). Children as a unique vulnerable segment of the market particularly has been a source of debate and opposing views (Kennedy et al, 2019).

The issue has grown in importance due to the evolution from physical to online environment of marketing techniques used, raising concerns on the impact of these campaigns on children. Today, children can be easily reached through diverse communication channels, facing numerous marketing messages (Livingstone et al, 2019). One problem lay within the data exploitation tools used in an online space that can lead to violations of their rights of privacy (Kennedy et al, 2019). Additionally, the products marketed can have serious negative effects on children's wellbeing, for example sugary foods contributing to the ongoing growth of obesity among other health issues (Bouchenef A, Domi S, 2021).

In Algeria, there is a significant lack of research addressing this topic as well as a lack of societal awareness which also has been identified as an urgent problem to address by consumer protection association APOCE. Given the rapid growth of online marketing and its potential negative impact on children, it is imperative to understand the children's side of view and state of understanding of new marketing strategies and tools to develop effective measures to protect young consumers tailoring policies and awareness campaigns based on their needs.

In this research, we aim to investigate children's perceptions and attitudes towards online advertising, more particularly targeted advertising. Consequently, children's awareness of their online privacy will be an important element examined throughout the study. By implementing

qualitative method consisting of focus group discussions while taking into consideration ethical issues.

## **2. Research Questions:**

It is hoped that the results will provide insight to answering the following research questions:

1. How does children's level of advertising literacy impact their ability to identify and resist persuasive tactics employed in targeted online advertising?
2. How aware are children of their online privacy including data collection practices?
3. How does exposure to targeted advertising influence children's product desire, brand attitude, and purchase intentions?

## **3. Significance of the Study**

Researching this topic plays a crucial role in ensuring the protection of children within the digital sector, more particularly within the Algerian context where there is a general lack of research addressing this issue. This includes giving children the chance to voice out their personal thoughts and beliefs about targeted advertising, identifying potential risks associated with how children's data is shared and used online, and gaining valuable insights that could be instrumental for policymakers and consumer protection organizations to safeguard young users from unethical marketing practices.

## **4. Structure of the Research**

The research is structured as follows: Chapter 1 reviews literature on marketing ethics to children, focusing on global and Algerian protection frameworks, targeted advertising, and advertising literacy. Chapter 2 details the qualitative approach employed including data collection, sampling, analysis, epistemological framework, and ethical considerations. Chapter 3 presents findings on children's advertising literacy, online behavior, understanding of data collection, perceptions of personalized content, and trust in online marketing, concluding with the impact of targeted

advertising on children's desires, attitudes, and purchase intentions, and implications for child consumer protection.

Finally, this paper is of personal interest due to the growing concern over the ethical implications of marketing to vulnerable populations, particularly children, and the need to develop more effective measures to protect them in the digital age.

# **CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

After searching key research papers relevant to our topic targeted advertising towards children, it allowed for identifying related theories and terminology used in the current state of literature, plus we were able to find gaps existing to formulate the main research problem while also creating a basis for comparison to discuss the end results of our study, in this chapter we will summarize a review of literature and build a conceptual framework of the important aspects surrounding the ethical issues, privacy concerns, and impacts of targeted advertising on children.

## **I. Literature review**

Section one begins by laying out the most relevant studies on digital marketing targeted at children, and looks at the most important ethical issues raised such as the impact of advertising and the dilemma of data privacy, in contrast it will look into what have been done to protect this vulnerable segment of the market from unethical exploitation.

Today, individuals are compelled to be online due to the increasing digitalization of various aspects of life, including work, education, communication, and entertainment. (Benberghout, 2021, p. 278), Marketing consequently has evolved to integrate various digital channels such as social media, search engines, email and mobile devices shifting traditional strategies to develop further the customer centric approach. Additionally, this evolution has simplified the collection of the needed data to be analyzed for an effective evaluation of the market's state; Because of this, personal data has become a significant revenue generator for many companies, particularly those in the technology and digital marketing sectors, through various tools. A large amount of personal information can be gathered easily such as browsing history, location, even health and financial data which gets monetized later through investments in targeted advertising, data brokers (third party companies selling personal data), while this practice is what enhances the browsing experience, it also raises issues related to privacy. (Benberghout, 2021, p. 278) One reason is that many users unintentionally leave data traces online that later are used to design effective personalized advertisements (Van der Hof, 2016). (S.Srivastava et al, 2023, p. 560).

It has been reported that children aged (aged 0-8) across 21 developed countries have left a trace online through their parents' engagement. Chaudron et al. 's (2018) (Livingstone et al 2019, p. 17) This underscores the significance of addressing the online presence of this demographic. In this review, we will focus on examining targeted advertising directed at children in digital

environments, since children are considered one of the most vulnerable groups found online, Kennedy et al (2019) in their conceptual article recognized children as distinctive consumers due to their complex cognitive development stages and how that impacts their ability to understand the intent behind influential marketing messages both offline and digitally. Study by Bouchenef A&Domi S (2021) using a descriptive analytical approach supports the previous proposition highlighting the vulnerable traits of children and how each age phase represents an opportunity to marketers to craft effective marketing strategies based on psychological preferences across different ages.

### **1. The ethical issues**

There is a long-standing debate on the ethicality of advertising to children, considering the reality that children as a vulnerable demographic are exposed daily to different marketing practices. Several studies are in agreement on the motives behind marketers' dedicated efforts toward this segment, since it represents a timely lucrative opportunity and future profitability, One way marketers achieve this is by creating brand loyalty which translate into long term profit, they use advergames and appealing characters aiming to induce positive emotional response and shaping favorable attitudes towards the brand , facing these tactics children find it hard to critically evaluate the persuasive intent of advertisement (Media Awareness Network 2005). (Van Reijmersdal et al 2012). (Kennedy et al 2019). Moreover, marketers employ children's influence on their social circle as strong brand advocates guiding others' decisions, in an online environment children aim to meet their interactive social needs, this makes them a strong influential market by sharing content with their peers and contributing to word of mouth of products and brands. (Kennedy et al. 2019; Bouchenef A, Domi S. 2021).

In contrast, Children are just experiencing life, navigating their internal and external environments, exploring and learning about themselves and their place in the world. Brands with different marketing messages can have a pivotal role in shaping their view on self-identity and their economic behavior (Chaplin and John 2005). (Kennedy et al, 2019). The first most talked about ethical issue is children's limited cognitive ability to understand the different elements of advertisements and the selling intent behind, several studies point out the susceptibility of Children

to the persuasive elements of advertising even if they do distinguish it from other types of content, the authors argue that taking advantage of their native nature is unethical and manipulative practice (Kennedy et al, 2019, p. 5).

Research on Child's ability to recognize the persuasive nature of Television advertisement has showed that children go through three developmental phases were they showed gradual levels of understanding, under the age of 7, children found it difficult to understand the selling intent, from 7 to 11 children had a better ability to distinguish the advertisements while depending on their parents assistance but still lack the critical thinking skills to grasp the full commercial picture of advertising, in contrast to that at 12 age and older adolescents were capable of identifying the basic selling and attitudinal objectives of advertisements (John DR, 1999) ( Radesky et al,2020), however Vanwesenbeeck et al (2017)s experimental study highlighting the difference between television and online advertisement found that the ability to distinguish ADs online did not mature with age, This indicates a unique challenge posed by online advertising, where children of different age groups may struggle equally to discern the commercial intent of digital advertisements. In the same light studies have addressed the problem in older age groups as well; adolescent's limited critical thinking skills presented a major issue when it comes to targeted advertising because of the difficulty they face when distinguishing between the persuasive intention from social content (Zarouali et al., 2020). (S.Srivastava et al 2023, p. 560). It is important to note that recognition doesn't mean critical evaluation of ADs, while children may be able to identify that they are viewing an advertisement, they may still lack the cognitive skills and knowledge to assess the persuasive intent, credibility of claims, or potential biases within the AD content which is a reflection of their immature levels of advertising literacy (Radesky et al, 2020).

This lack of economic knowledge can have critical repercussions, altering children's ability to make well informed decisions. Their consumer culture can be impacted negatively by targeted advertising that promotes the ideology of consumerism encouraging the consumption of goods in increasing amounts. The precision of targeting in such ads, while effective for marketers, raises apprehensions regarding the potential negative impacts on young consumers' physical and mental well-being. (Kennedy et al, 2019), The World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2023 published a document pointing out the importance of addressing the undeniable negative impact of promoting unhealthy food and beverages towards children using

manipulative strategies that subsequently leads to detrimental effects on children's health on the long term. Mental health has also been discussed, as for the adverse impact on children's self-esteem when they are unable to meet the criteria for membership in specific brand communities, resulting in feelings of exclusion from their peer groups and the risk of imposing certain stereotypes on children associated with targeted advertising, by restricting their experience online to the information presented in the advertising content (Kennedy et al, 2019)

Most online advertisement relies on datafication and profiling to target individuals based on their previous behavior, detecting their interests and what is most likely appeal to them, when it comes to children the collection of their personal data presents concerning threats to their rights of privacy, this is related to the child's critical thinking skills issue presented above.

Livingstone et al (2019) and van der Hof et al (2020) posed the question of children's ability to understand consensual contracts and agreements arguing that children won't be able to weigh the long-term consequences of the datafication of their online profiles as well as automated decision making. Which enforces the dilemma of the child's engagement online, while it is an essential right for children to partake in the digital environment, they still appreciate their privacy. In agreement with (Livingstone, 2019), (Luci Pangrazio, Lourdes Cardozo-Gaibisso, 2021) and (Stoilova et al,2020) a study by Ge Wang et al, 2022 indicated that children's ability to understand the datafication process is limited through implementing interviews with 48 children aged 7-13 from UK schools, The findings showed that children are unable to understand the journey of their data online , and who has access to their personal information noting their ability to make well informed decisions in relation to sharing these personal data can be affected by the opacity of datafication practices. Furthermore Benberghout, 2021 using a descriptive analytical approach found that even adult consumers do not try to negotiate the terms of privacy online so they can get access to the appealing services and products offered, much less among children.

In the same vein of young consumers perception of datafication practice, Zarouali et al (2020) carried out a quantitative research investigating adolescents advertising literacy development with age and their engagement in privacy protective strategies in accordance with De Pauw et al. (2017)s study demonstrated that recognizing targeted advertisement among adolescents doesn't necessarily reflect their awareness level of the underlying process of datafication . which includes

data collection, profiling and targeting, the lack of transparency of these strategies is considered an obstacle when making a critical assessment prior to consenting to user terms. The research also showed empirical evidence of adolescents not actively engaging in protective tactics against the tracking of their data for commercial gain. The evidence supports the privacy paradox which was first popularized by Barnes, 2006 discussing the online behavior of young users; the term refers to being privacy wary and not engaging in protective strategies, this inconsistency has been attributed to the perceived risk evaluation against the benefit gained from getting access to services. This risk is related to reciprocity; a key component of the value of privacy recognized by Steeves and Regan (2014), the authors noted that it should involve two sides negotiating the terms in online contracts basing the relationship on transparency and trust, the study argued how some online relationships fail to meet this criterion which leads to invading the commercial privacy since the consent giver is met with strict options to agree or disagree (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 11)

Sonali Srivastava et al, 2023 By employing qualitative modes of enquiry exploring adolescents' awareness of online profiling and their interpretations of online advertising, found in alignment with previous research that adolescents are aware of certain data is being tracked such as their previous online actions (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020), location information (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020) and demographic details (Keen, 2020) based on the targeted advertisement they receive. while indicating high levels of discomfort over the collection of location data, reflecting a strong value placed on physio-spatial privacy. Also, participants perceived profiling as if they were being surveilled which was connected to the social presence theory. Moreover, participants were concerned about the promotion of overconsumption culture through targeted advertisement because they are offered what they desire and that can stop them from evaluating their purchase behavior objectively. However, consistently with Keen's (2020) study, some participants displayed low levels of concern about the gathering of their personal data trusting familiar apps, the author linked the findings to the information boundary theory which suggests that consumers have varying expectations of privacy. In fact, the results indicated that targeted advertisement can be perceived as helpful optimizing the participants online experience by receiving tailored offers to their personal needs. Additionally Akin to the findings of Stoilova et al. 's (2019a) study age seemed to not influence privacy awareness. However, with a small variation in the age of the participants the authors were not certain on the significance of the age impact. Finally, the research showed concern over the normalization of data tracking based on previous online activities among

adolescents although it could be considered as a violation of their privacy rights. Questions arise about consent, transparency, and the responsible handling of sensitive information.

It is important to point out that the study took place in Finland, a country well-known for dedicating great effort to providing educational programs and initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy and online safety among adolescents. This context may have influenced the participants' awareness and attitudes towards online profiling and advertising, considering the emphasis placed on digital education within the Finnish educational system.

Another interesting finding of an experimental study of 363 adolescents aged 16-18 from six different schools in Belgium found that the purchase intention decreased as their level of privacy concerns increased due to textual debriefing, we can conclude that when increasing their awareness of the nature of advertising they are exposed to they engage in a coping strategy (Zarouali et al., 2017: 162). (Livingstone et al, 2019, pp. 15,16)

In conclusion, it is necessary to consider various factors when studying children's awareness. because children's awareness does not progress in a straightforward, linear manner with age, as it is shaped by numerous variables related to their individual characteristics and the external environment. This complexity in children's development underscores the importance of taking a holistic approach to understanding their awareness. (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 17)

## **2. Child consumer protection ecosystem**

Much of the research on this topic expresses concerns about marketers exploiting the vulnerability of children advocating for changes in existing regulations to address the evolving online market trends as well as providing more media literacy educational programs to all parties involved in protecting children's rights (Kennedy et al 2019), this includes parents, schools, brands targeting children, regulatory bodies, consumer protection associations.

Parents play a crucial role in ensuring children's safety online and guiding them into making rational consumption decisions, by having open discussions exploring children's thoughts, identify knowledge gaps and encouraging media literacy is one of the most effective actions that can be

taken to increase children's comprehension of the digital environment nature (Radesky et al, 2020). Also, Parents establish rules and boundaries regarding screen time, content consumption, and online interactions. These boundaries help children develop healthy digital habits and protect them from excessive exposure to inappropriate content or online risks, additionally most protective strategies online use parents' mediation as for requiring parents' consent and parental control service, this puts a major responsibility on parents' supervision and monitoring. (Livingstone et al, 2019), However, the question of the safety of children without proper parental support remains, it has been noted that there is a serious lack of literature investigating the impact on vulnerable children's privacy, because a child's right to privacy shouldn't depend on the existence of a responsible caregiver (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 28).

Most research draws the conclusion that it is essential to limit the processing of children's as well as adolescents' online data due to their lack of rational when evaluating the persuasive intent of advertising (Zarouali et al, 2020, p. 362) (Kennedy et al, 2019).

When it comes to food marketing targeted at children and adolescents, several organizations and initiatives play a significant role in regulating and monitoring advertising practices. The Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) and the Children's Confection Advertising Initiative (CCAI) are two such initiatives that aim to promote responsible advertising to children. These initiatives involve voluntary commitments by participating companies to adhere to specific guidelines regarding the marketing of food and beverage products to children. The CFBAI, for example, sets standards for advertising to children under the age of 12, requiring that advertising primarily directed at children promote healthier dietary choices and encourage physical activity. Similarly, the CCAI focuses on promoting responsible advertising of confectionery products to children.

By participating in these initiatives, companies agree to limit the advertising of certain products to children and to ensure that their marketing messages are truthful, accurate, and age-appropriate. This includes refraining from using certain marketing tactics that may appeal to children's emotions or exploit their lack of understanding, such as using animated characters or celebrities to endorse unhealthy products.

Overall, these initiatives represent efforts by the industry to self-regulate and address concerns about the impact of food marketing on children's dietary habits and health. However, the

effectiveness of such voluntary initiatives remains a subject of debate, and further research is needed to assess their impact on children's food choices and health outcomes.

On the other hand, data privacy has become a global concern addressed by various regulatory frameworks. Among these, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in the United States, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, and the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) in the United States are notable examples.

COPPA, enacted in 1998 and updated in 2013, imposes certain requirements on website operators and online services that collect personal information from children under the age of 13. It requires these operators to obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting, using, or disclosing personal information from children, and it also sets forth guidelines for the security and confidentiality of such information.

The GDPR, implemented in 2018, is a comprehensive data protection law that applies to all organizations processing the personal data of individuals in the European Union. While not specifically targeted at children, the GDPR includes provisions related to the processing of children's personal data, requiring parental consent for children under the age of 16 in most cases. CARU, established by the advertising industry in 1974, is a self-regulatory program aimed at ensuring that advertising directed at children is truthful, accurate, and not deceptive. It reviews advertising and promotional materials to ensure compliance with its guidelines and addresses complaints regarding potentially misleading or inappropriate advertising directed at children.

These regulatory frameworks aim to protect children's privacy and ensure responsible advertising practices in the digital age. However, challenges remain in effectively enforcing these regulations and keeping pace with rapidly evolving technology and advertising practices. Ongoing research and collaboration between regulators, industry stakeholders, and child advocacy groups are essential to address these challenges and safeguard children's privacy rights in the digital environment.

On the national level, the regulations outlined in Articles 30 to 34 of the legislative framework address various aspects of advertising and promotions via electronic communications. When considering targeted advertising aimed at children, these provisions become particularly relevant. For instance, Article 30 mandates that any commercial message sent electronically must be clearly identifiable as such, ensuring transparency for recipients, including children and their guardians.

This requirement helps safeguard children from deceptive or misleading advertising practices by ensuring they can recognize commercial content. Additionally, Article 31 prohibits direct prospecting to individuals who have not consented to receive marketing messages, protecting children from unsolicited advertising. Furthermore, Article 32 ensures that individuals, including children, have the right to opt out of receiving electronic advertisements, providing them with control over their exposure to marketing content. In the event of disputes regarding advertising practices targeting children, Article 33 places the burden of proof on e-providers to demonstrate compliance with regulatory standards, enhancing accountability in advertising practices. Finally, Article 34 prohibits the dissemination of advertising for products or services prohibited from marketing to children, aligning with broader legal frameworks aimed at protecting minors from inappropriate content. Together, these regulations establish a comprehensive framework to govern targeted advertising directed at children, promoting transparency, consent, and ethical practices in electronic marketing communications.

That being said, M.Hamich 2017 and Bouchenef A, Domi S (2021) recognized gaps in the existing policies related to children's marketing especially in the digital environment, as for clarity of definitions within law articles as well as using parents mediating coping strategies same as the international level, they both acknowledge the need to explore this topic further for a comprehensive understanding within the Algerian context.

The literature review highlights the ethical implications of targeted advertising towards children in the evolving online environment. The need for further research and discussion on ethical advertising to children is evident, as these practices have significant effects on young consumers. It is recommended that companies adopt more precise ethical guidelines, such as ensuring transparency, avoiding manipulation tactics, and promoting responsible advertising targeted at child consumers. By implementing these measures, the industry can contribute to fostering healthy consumer behaviors among children while also prioritizing their well-being and autonomy in decision-making processes.

## **II. Conceptual frame**

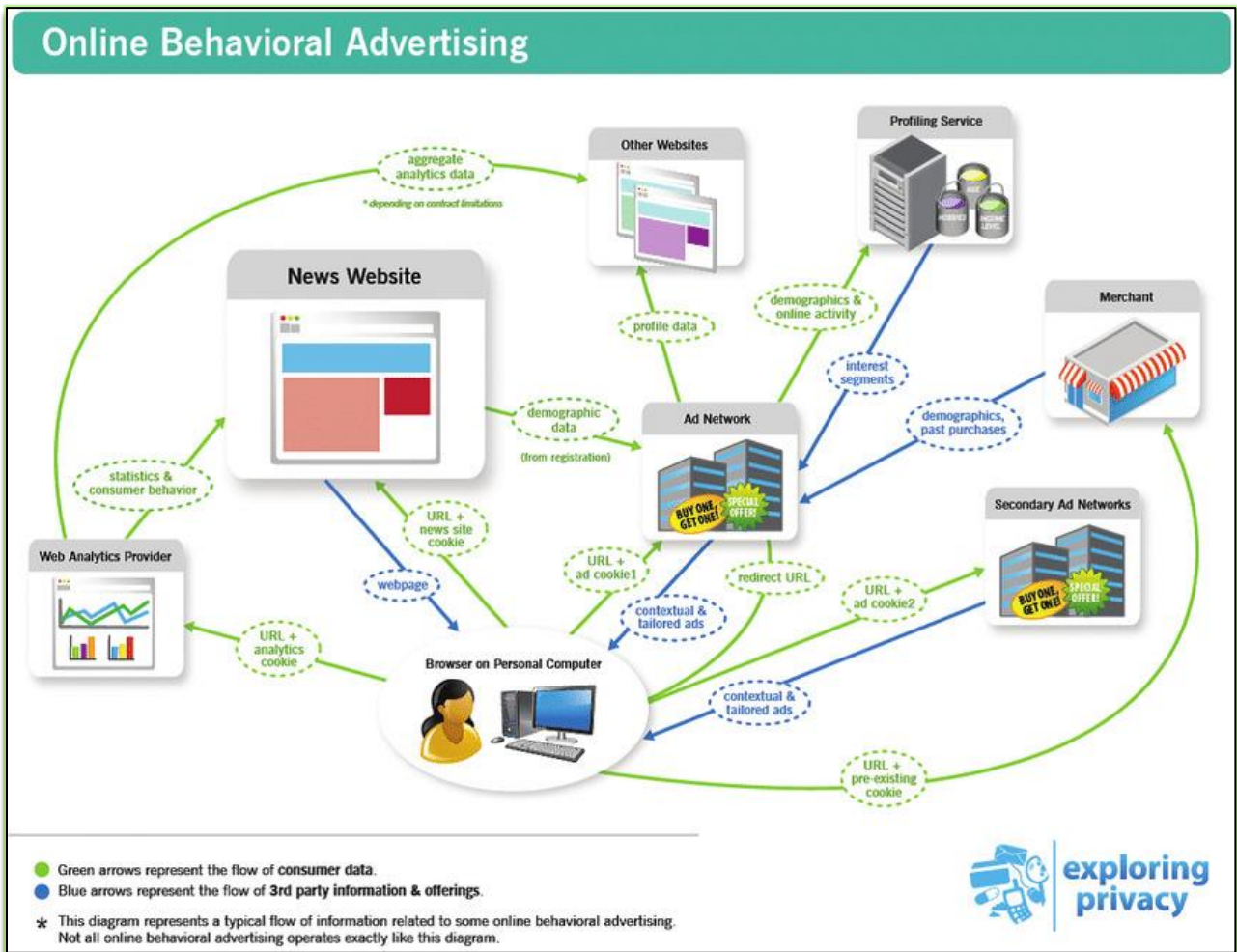
Having discussed the background and the literature relevant to this research, this section aims to provide a conceptual theoretical framework based on previous studies and theories to construct a model serving as a guide for the empirical study. Different relevant variables are defined such as online behavioral advertising, online privacy, advertising literacy and its implication in the children's consumer context, at the end a model has been established that illustrates different expected relationships between variables.

### **1. Targeted advertising**

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by targeted advertising or sometimes referred to as online behavioral advertising, it is a type of advertising that have been tailored specifically based on the available personal data the advertiser has about the end recipient. These data may include demographics, browsing history, location information, interests, purchasing behavior, and other relevant user data collected through various online channels. (Schumann et al., 2014, p. 59; S. Srivastava et al, 2023, p. 560), noting that it excludes first-party activities, limited to a website's own or affiliated sites, as well as AD delivery that doesn't hinge on user preferences inferred from data collected across non-affiliated websites. Moreover, OBA does not encompass AD reporting, including statistical analysis, web analytics, and advertising metrics. Additionally, contextual advertising, which personalize advertisement based on the current webpage visited content, falls outside the scope of OBA.

The process of targeted advertisement consists of three main phases (see figure 1). First data is collected mainly using files on the personal device called cookies, these usually help link the IP address of the device to the network server allowing it to know the unique user's preference and emerging trends in his online behavior, other frequently used tools are plugins and fingerprinting. Second phase evolves profiling, it is a data mining method used to transform the collected data into categorized information about users' profiles resulting in valuable knowledge about different target segments, finally this is followed by tailoring personalized advertisement based on the profiles generated (Verdoodt et al, 2017). This process enables marketers to offer relevant products and services to each individuals interests and preferences leading to an opportunity to optimize customer base expansion and resource allocation.

Figure 1: a diagram of a typical flow of information related to OBA



**Source:** Curtis, Brenda. (2014). Social Networking and Online Recruiting for HIV Research. Journal of empirical research on human research ethics: JERHRE. 9. 58-70. 10.1525/jer.2014.9.1.58.

As mentioned in the literature review, the new advancements made in marketing strategies are a source of an increasing concern more particularly when it comes to vulnerable individuals such as children; whom characterized with limited cognitive ability to comprehend privacy terms and the selling intent of targeted advertisements, making them especially susceptible to manipulative marketing strategies and persuasive tactics (Kennedy et al, 2019).

## 2. Child recognition of the selling intent

J. Williams, N. Ashill, P. Thirkell (2016) conducted two-stage qualitative investigation using diaries and interviews exploring perceptions of children aged 7–14 years providing insight on how children perceive value from emotional, social and functional benefit standpoint; depending on different factors while the most notable being age, the article used the consumer socialization of children theory as a theoretical framework which is a widely used by many research articles (Panackal, N., Sharma, A., & Rautela, S. (2024). (Kennedy, A.-M., Jones, K., & Williams, J., 2019), (Radesky, Reid Chassiakos, Ameenuddin, Navsaria, 2020)), it provides in depth comprehension of how children acquire the economic knowledge within their social environment to become consumers while being influenced by different socialization agents, One of the key findings of the theory suggests that child's ability to recognize the persuasive nature of TV ADs goes through three developmental phases were they showed gradual levels of understanding, under the age of 7 children had a difficulty in understanding the selling intent, from 7 to 11 children had a better ability to distinguish the advertisements while depending on their parents assistance but still lack the critical thinking skills to grasp the full commercial picture of advertising, in contrast to that at 12 year olds age and older adolescents were capable of identifying the basic selling and attitudinal objectives of advertisements (John DR. Consumer socialization of children: a retrospective look at twenty five years of research. *J Consum Res.* 1999;26(3):183–213) (Radesky, Reid Chassiakos, Ameenuddin, Navsaria, 2020)

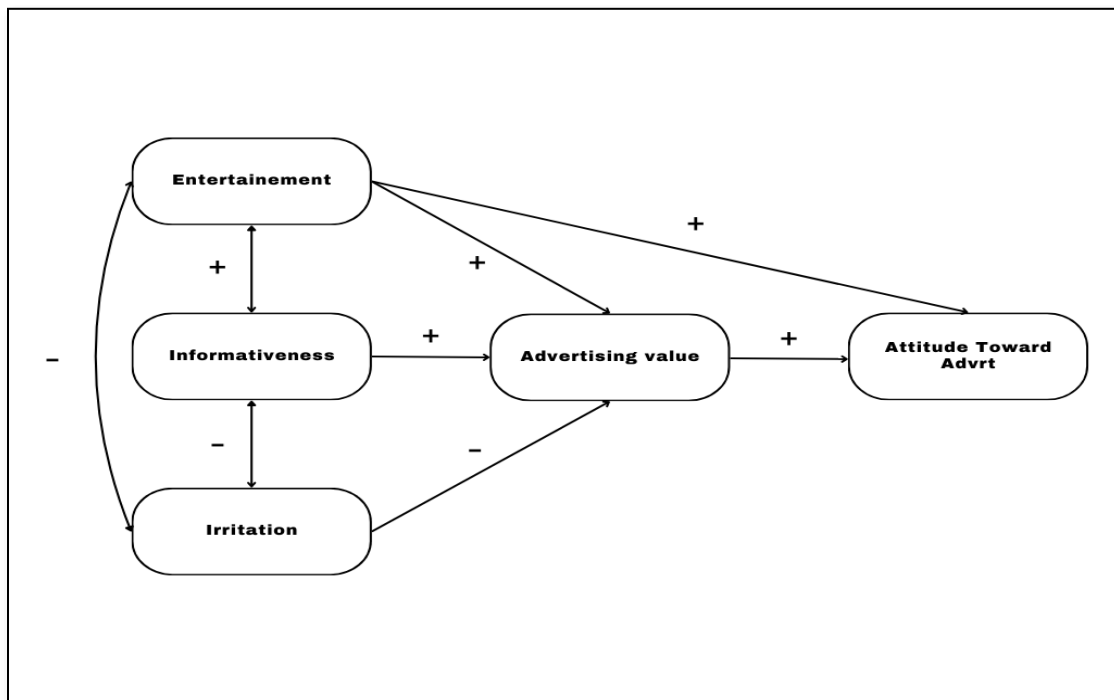
These maturing stages may differ in the online environment due to the difficulty of detecting embedded commercial content within different social platforms (Zarouali et al., 2020). (Sonali Srivastava, Terhi-Anna Wilska, Jussi Nyrhinen, 2023, p. 560), marketers use a wide range of tools to create immersive experiences appealing to children and building emotional connections with brands. Prior research has well illustrated the limited ability of children to recognize advertisements online more particularly the understanding of the selling intent behind

## 3. OBA impact on children's product desire and brand attitude

Online behavioral advertising has been proven by many studies to be more effective compared to other traditional forms, this is seen in terms of increasing purchase intentions and product desire as well as brand likeness, a survey was conducted by Ayse Bengi Ozcelik and Kaan Varnali (2018)

on 409 adult students found that customized messages online have a positive impact on purchase intention and brand attitude, the results were linked to Ducoffe's model (1996) on web advertising (see figure 2) which indicates three key dimensions in advertisements: informativeness, entertainment, irritation. The research indicates that both the informative and entertaining aspect of ADs play crucial roles in increasing consumer engagement and perception of the brand. As for children, their ability to analyze commercial content is not fully matured yet in comparison to adults as discussed above, making them more susceptible to its impact. several studies argue against the use of persuasive tactics that increases purchase and positive brand attitude since it can be problematic regarding certain types of products, this can be seen in food marketing leading to detrimental health risks and disordered behavioral habits (Smith R, 2019; Théodore, F.L.et al, 2021).

**Figure 2: Ducoffe's model (1996) on web advertising**



**Source:** Advertising Versus Product Placements: How Consumers Assess the Value of Each. February 2013, Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, 34(1):21-38.

#### 4. Privacy, consent and children's vulnerability

In 1971, Miller in his book entitled the assault on privacy predicted the complexity of the challenges we face today in the digital age in terms of the individual's span of control over their personal information emphasizing that Policy makers must ensure that data privacy is a guaranteed right to protect. On the other hand multiple recent studies argue that children's critical thinking skills of these opaque datafication practices are highly limited which leads to even further complications surrounding the validity of young users consent to different terms of use online while also highlighting the lack of empirical evidence addressing children's awareness and understanding of such concepts (S.Srivastava et al, 2023; Livingstone et al 2019). Companies do not provide a clear and simple explanation to how they gather data and how it is being used leaving consumers uninformed about the future implication of sharing personal information (Benberghout, 2021, p. 277), which may contravene with children's right of privacy (UNCRC Article 16) and the right to be free of exploitation (UNCRC Articles 32 and 36), additionally profiling may violate children's rights indicated in articles 13 and 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by narrowing their ability to live through new experiences. Moreover, profiling can exacerbate societal biases by perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination. Algorithms may categorize children based on factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status, leading to biased recommendations and reinforcing existing societal inequalities (S.Srivastava et al, 2023).

##### **Privacy definition:**

Nissenbaum's defined privacy as:

*'Neither a right to secrecy nor a right to control, but a right to appropriate flow of personal information' (Nissenbaum, 2010: 3)*

This definition similar to Steeves and Regan (2014)'s observation recognized reciprocity as a key component of the value of privacy, that it should involve two sides negotiating the terms basing the relationship on transparency and trust, (Livingstone et al. 2019a) argue that many online relationships fail to meet this criteria which leads to invading the commercial privacy given that the consent giver is met with strict options to either agree and benefit from the offer or dissent and

forego potential advantages (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 11), internet users consent to the collection of different types of data, privacy lawyer Simone van der Hof (2016) distinguished three: given, traces and inferred data (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 16).

Children's awareness of the underlying procedures of targeted advertising has been the central focus of few studies (Ge Wang et al 2022; S.Srivastava et al 2023). Research conducted by De Pauw et al. (2017) demonstrated that recognizing a targeted advertisement among adolescents doesn't necessarily reflect their level awareness of the underlying process of datafication making their online privacy controversial (Zarouali et al, 2020, p. 353)

According to recent reports reflecting the levels of children's awareness of their commercial privacy, 5- to 7-year-old children might not use protective tactics, but rather focus on their social privacy and depending on adults to orient their actions online (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 19). The second age group identified is 8- to 11-year olds Children's which are similarly rely on their parents guidance and prioritize their social privacy starting to value their independence engaging in strategies that allows for use far from parental supervision, children this age also grow to be more curious about their environment including the virtual one this can lead to finding content preceded by warning notices to be more appealing(Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 16).The last age group is children between 12 and 17 years of age , they are believed to have gained a basic comprehension of profiling making simple connections between their previous actions and the content they are recommended as well as targeted ADs but can't explain the process of datafication nor the future implications of sharing personal data (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 20), the research concludes that children are more concerned with their social privacy and less aware of commercial privacy Since they mostly aim to not expose personal data to other users rather than companies (Livingstone et al, 2019, p. 20; Zarouali et al, 2020, p. 354).

As Mentioned before, the privacy paradox theory can explain the degree to which individuals engage in protective strategies. It is important to understand that interlinked factors influencing the threshold for privacy, the first factor is incomplete information; the amount of digital information present today is quite overwhelming hindering the acquiring of the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions , second factor is found in the bounded rationality theory which argues even if information is available individuals rational and cognitive ability is limited

and affected by the third factor which is psychological deviations found in human beings attributed to their genetics and nurturing environment (A. Acquisti , J. Grossklags, , 2005). But since our research subjects cognitive ability is naturally limited as outlined earlier their privacy protection is the responsibility of caregivers, educators, policymakers, and technology developers alike (Ge Wang et al 2022; Kennedy et al, 2019; Radesky et al 2020; S.Srivastava et al, 2023).

## **5. Childs Advertising literacy**

One of the core elements of media literacy is advertising literacy, many studies proved its significant role in protecting children from the persuasive tactics employed in different types of advertisement through strengthening their critical skills and ability to evaluate more objectively the different emotional and informative content of ADs (Rozeendaal et al, 2011; Kennedy et al, 2019; Zarouali et al, 2020). there are several frameworks developed to assess advertising literacy but only few among children (Yujue Wang et al, 2023).

Most existing models maintain that recognizing advertisement and understanding the selling intent of advertisements is a basic dimension of advertising literacy, however, Rozeendaal et al (2011) expanded upon the existing models to include two other dimensions; attitudinal and performance; arguing that the use of this knowledge when exposed to the stimuli should also be put into consideration, Since several studies proved that recognition of ADs and understanding the selling intent doesn't always entail resisting the persuasive marketing messages. The framework provided acknowledge children's susceptibility to the affective elements of advertisements, emphasizing the importance of addressing these factors in promoting advertising literacy among young consumers. (Rozeendaal et al, 2011). The table below illustrates the main definitions of the different components of children's advertising literacy adapted from Rozeendaal et al (2011):

**Table 1: A Three-Dimensional Conceptualization of Children’s Advertising Literacy**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Conceptual advertising literacy</b>	<b>Recognition of advertising</b>	The ability to differentiate advertising from other media content (e.g., television programs, editorial Web content).
	<b>Understanding selling intent</b>	The ability to understand that advertising tries to sell products.
	<b>Recognition of advertising’s source</b>	The ability to understand who pays for advertising messages.
	<b>Perception of intended audience</b>	The ability to understand the concept of audience targeting and segmentation.
	<b>Understanding persuasive intent</b>	The ability to understand that advertising attempts to influence consumers’ behavior by changing their mental states, for instance their attitudes and cognitions about a product.
	<b>Understanding persuasive tactics</b>	The ability to understand that advertisers use specific tactics to change consumers’ attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors.
	<b>Understanding advertising’s bias</b>	The awareness of discrepancies between the advertised and the actual product.
<b>Advertising literacy performance</b>	<b>Retrieval of advertising literacy</b>	The ability to retrieve relevant advertising-related knowledge from memory while processing an advertising message.
	<b>Application of advertising literacy</b>	The ability to apply retrieved advertising-related knowledge to an advertising message (i.e., construct defense responses) while processing the message.

Dimensions	Components	Definitions
Attitudinal advertising literacy	Skepticism toward advertising	The tendency toward disbelief of advertising.
	Disliking of advertising	A general negative attitude toward advertising.

**Source:** Esther Rozendaal, Matthew A. Lapierre, Eva A. van Reijmersdal & Moniek Buijzen (2011): Reconsidering Advertising Literacy as a Defense Against Advertising Effects, *Media Psychology*, 14:4, 333-354

Acquiring knowledge about advertising literacy may not be as challenging as its the retrieval and application in an online environment due to the embedded nature of digital marketing where ADs become a seamless part of the entertaining content (Kennedy et al, 2019), in addition to that children screen time is linked to increased levels of impulsivity which is characterized by difficulty regulating emotions and unpremeditated decision making (Guerrero MD, Barnes JD, Walsh JJ, et al, 2019) this raises further concerns about the effectiveness of advertising literacy performance, especially in relation to children's online behavior.

In S.Srivastava et al (2023)s study conducted in Finland; a region of which media literacy is highly valued and integrated among a variety of educational programs from a young age; found gaps in adolescents digital advertising literacy urging policy makers to adapt regulations to address the ethical issues arising from profiling and datafication practices.

In sum to investigate children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising within the Algerian context, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How does children's level of advertising literacy impact their ability to identify and resist persuasive tactics employed in targeted online advertising?
2. . How aware are children of their online privacy including data collection practices?

3. How does exposure to targeted advertising influence children's product desire, brand attitude, and purchase intentions?

This chapter has been a recapitulation of the most significant studies on the topic of advertising targeted towards children, drawing upon foundational previous findings and methodological approaches applied concerning children's advertising literacy and privacy awareness. A set of questions has been established to guide the rest of the research design which will be detailed in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND**  
**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

As mentioned above, the review of the literature has been essential to defining the following phases of the research design including the choice of the host organization and the methodological approach implemented, this chapter will be divided into two main sections stating the organizational context as well as the rationale of the methodology implemented in the study.

## **I. The organizational context**

This section looks at the organizational context of the research and how the implication of the results will contribute with valuable insights to the hosting organization. We will explore the key laws and regulations that govern child consumer protection, highlighting the most active organizations, particularly the Algerian Organization for Consumer Protection and Guidance (APOCE). Additionally, we will discuss APOCE's initiative, the Young Consumer Project, and outline the organization's values, mission, objectives.

### **1. The Algerian Child Consumer Protection Ecosystem:**

The protection of child consumers in Algeria is governed by a robust framework of laws and regulations designed to safeguard the interests of young consumers. This framework is aligned with international standards and reflects the country's commitment to upholding children's rights in the consumer market. Key legislation includes the Consumer Protection Law, the Law on Advertising, and various regulations specific to online advertising practices. These laws aim to ensure that advertising directed at children is ethical, non-deceptive, and respectful of their developmental stages.

The Algerian government has also established several bodies and agencies to oversee the implementation and enforcement of these regulations. Among these, the Ministry of Trade plays a crucial role in regulating advertising practices and ensuring compliance with consumer protection laws. Additionally, the National Commission for the Protection of Children and various non-governmental organizations contribute to advocacy and awareness efforts regarding child consumer protection.

## **2. APOCE (Association for the Protection and Orientation of the Consumer and his Environment):**

APOCE is non-profit independent organization, dedicated to Algerian consumer affairs, was founded 6th of august 2015 to promote a culture of responsible consumption and defend their material and moral rights, empowering them to actively participate in a genuine and comprehensive developmental initiative, it is an organization that works tirelessly to ensure that consumers are treated fairly and are protected from any form of exploitation. The association operates under several national laws which focuses on protecting consumers' health, safety, and economic interests.

### **APOCE: Values, Mission, Objectives**

#### **Values**

APOCE operates on a foundation of core values that guide its activities and interactions with stakeholders. These values include:

- **Integrity:** Commitment to honesty and ethical behavior in all actions.
- **Transparency:** Openness in operations and decision-making processes.
- **Advocacy:** Strong support for consumer rights and proactive engagement in policy discussions.
- **Education:** Emphasis on educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities.
- **Collaboration:** Working with various stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector, to enhance consumer protection.

#### **Mission**

APOCE's mission is to protect and promote consumer rights in Algeria by advocating for ethical business practices, educating the public, and ensuring compliance with consumer protection laws. The organization strives to create a fair and safe marketplace where consumers, especially vulnerable groups like children, are well-informed and protected from exploitative practices.

#### **Objectives**

APOCE has outlined several key objectives to achieve its mission:

- 1. Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Advocate for stronger consumer protection laws and regulations, particularly those targeting the advertising industry and its impact on children.
- 2. Consumer Education and Awareness:** Develop and implement educational programs aimed at increasing consumer awareness about rights, responsibilities, and the potential risks of advertising.
- 3. Monitoring and Enforcement:** Monitor business practices to ensure compliance with consumer protection laws and collaborate with regulatory bodies to enforce these laws.
- 4. Research and Development:** Conduct research on consumer behavior, market trends, and the effectiveness of existing regulations to inform policy recommendations and advocacy efforts.
- 5. Collaboration and Networking:** Build partnerships with other consumer protection organizations, government agencies, and international bodies to strengthen the consumer protection ecosystem in Algeria.

### **3. APOCE Initiative: The Young Consumer Project**

One of the key initiatives undertaken by APOCE is its program focused on protecting young consumers. This initiative includes a series of campaigns aimed at educating children and their parents about consumer rights, safe consumption practices, and the potential risks of digital marketing. These campaigns are designed to raise awareness about the influence of targeted advertising on children and to promote responsible marketing practices among businesses.

My research on the attitudes and perceptions of children towards targeted advertising is highly relevant to APOCE, particularly within the framework of this initiative. Targeted advertising, especially when directed at children, raises significant ethical and privacy concerns. Understanding how children perceive and are influenced by these advertisements is crucial for developing effective consumer protection strategies. By exploring how children understand and react to targeted ADs, my study will provide APOCE with crucial insights into this vulnerable demographic.

The findings from my research will be instrumental for APOCE in several ways. Firstly, it will help the organization better understand the specific issues related to data privacy and advertising ethics concerning children. Children, being less aware of the tactics used in targeted advertising, are particularly susceptible to its influences. This makes it imperative to ensure that their rights and privacy are protected

Secondly, the insights gained from this research will inform APOCE's advocacy work. With a clearer understanding of children's attitudes and perceptions, APOCE can develop more targeted and effective educational campaigns aimed at both children and parents. These campaigns can help raise awareness about the potential risks associated with targeted advertising and how to mitigate them.

Finally, the research will enhance APOCE's strategies for protecting children's rights in the digital age. As digital marketing continues to evolve, it is essential for consumer protection organizations to stay ahead of new trends and challenges. My research will contribute to this ongoing effort by providing up-to-date information on the current state of children's interactions with targeted advertising.

In conclusion, my internship at APOCE offers a unique opportunity to contribute to an organization dedicated to consumer protection. By aligning my research with the mission and values of APOCE, I aim to provide valuable insights that will help safeguard the rights and interests of children in Algeria. This alignment underscores the importance of my study and its potential impact on enhancing consumer protection efforts within the organization.

## **II. Methodology:**

In this section we will provide an outline for the research methodology of this qualitative study implemented to answer the questions addressed previously regarding children's perception and attitudes towards targeted advertising and exploring their level of awareness of its impact as well as the ethical implications associated.

### **1. Epistemological stance:**

Children represent a unique demographic within society, the way they perceive their environment and construct their beliefs is different than adults. Therefore, interpretivism aligns closely with the main objectives of this research which prioritizes individuals' experiences of reality, when applying this approach, we can gain an in-depth insight of children's perceptions and attitudes through exploring the whole lived experience rather than limiting it to specific causality relationships, this allows for new ideas and valuable findings to emerge. (Husam Helmi Alharahsheh, Abraham Pius, 2020)

### **2. Methodological approach**

The aim of this study is to uncover the reality of online targeted advertising towards children in contrast to their perceptions and awareness of privacy terms in Algeria. Qualitative methods offer an effective way of learning about the research problem through participants understanding of related concepts in a flexible manner (John W. Creswell, J. David Creswell, 2023). Furthermore, there is lack of research within the Algerian context making it appropriate to choose a method that is exploratory in nature.

### **a. Data collection**

There is a variety of qualitative data collection methods, one of them is focus group discussions, a tool that brings small number of participants in a non-threatening environment led by a moderator, the number of participants can range from 5 to 10 participants depending on the issue in question (Hennink, 2014). Therefore, to achieve the aim of our study, primary qualitative data was required. Focus group discussions using semi structured interview were selected as the appropriate method because of the interactive group dynamic they offer. This format helps children, in particular, to feel less shy and more expressive, facilitating a deeper exploration of their thoughts and experiences (Stafford, Laybourn & Hill, 2003). A guide (see appendix A) was developed to orient the discussion using simple and clear questions in Arabic and colloquial language to help enhance a comfortable and familiar setting. Before the questions were asked, a video (see appendix B) displaying fictional animated characters with a variation of interests, for example a boy who enjoys drawing and a woman who has cooking as her favorite hobby was played to stimulate children's interest, this later was used for an easy activity that required children to match different kind of ADs to the characters. These kinds of activities were developed in an attempt to make each participant feel relaxed and engaged in the session as much as possible (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). Moreover, the researcher played an active role during the discussions asking questions following a sequential lining of questions, the guide navigates discussions on AD recognition, understanding the selling intent, privacy concerns, advertising impact and individual reactions, encouraging participants to reflect on their experiences and opinions.

The focus group sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed leaving out irrelevant content to the main research objectives, the duration of each varied, the time for the actual discussion was planned to not extend beyond 45 min since it is advised to avoid lengthy discussions because children cannot keep focused for long periods the same as adults do (Stafford, 2003). However, it must be noted that the focus group discussions with middle schoolers were way shorter than the ones with the younger children, making it to only 20 min, almost half of the others but they still contributed in obtaining valuable results so they were kept for analysis. And further explanation

will be provided later in the discussion section. After each session, the audio recorded, field notes and transcripts were reviewed to assess data saturation based on the redundancy of the presented information to optimize the number of the groups studied.

When performing qualitative methods especially when the sample consists of vulnerable segments it becomes essential to take into consideration the ethical issues (Hennink, 2014). The participants were informed prior about what the theme of the discussion will be as well as it is voluntary with the possibility to withdraw at any given moment. All children were given a forum to be filled by their parents, it contained all the necessary information about the study including its objectives, implication to the consumer protection organization (APOCE) and the method of recording ensuring the confidentiality of the information and transparency of the research (see Appendix C).

### **Sampling and selection:**

When opting for qualitative methods, the aim is to not generalize the findings but to attempt and explore different contexts of a phenomena this often leads researchers to favor non-random sampling methods (Hennink, 2014). Purposive sampling is the selected method in this study that took place in a suburban area “Oued Endja” a place located in Mila from 17 to 25 of April 2024 this will offer a unique setting that can be used later for comparison with other studies.

A sample of 41 children (18 Boys and 23 Girls) aged 8 to 14 were selected by their teachers, 4 discussions were conducted at public schools (3 primary schools and 1 middle school), the other two were approached through an English teacher and were conducted at the setting of their usual English private class. First, the size of the sample was decided based on the available logistic and time resources, plus the assessment of the answers given during the discussions. Gender can influence perceptions, experiences, and behaviors, so having both male and female participants ensures a diverse range of perspectives. Moreover the participants were chosen to include a variation of age to allow for rich collection of insights across different age groups. The table presented below offers information about the focus group discussions conducted:

**Table 2 :Focus group discussion demographic information**

	Number of participants	Gender	Age	Duration
<b>FGD 1</b>	7	4 Boys + 3 Girls	9 - 10	50 MIN
<b>FGD 2</b>	8	4 Boys + 4 Girls	10 - 11	40 MIN
<b>FGD 3</b>	5	6 Girls	12 - 13	20 MIN
<b>FGD 4</b>	7	3 Boys + 4 Girls	8 - 9	34 MIN
<b>FGD 5</b>	8	4 Boys + 4 Girls	10 - 11	40 MIN
<b>FGD 6</b>	6	3 Boys + 3 Girls	13 - 14	20 MIN

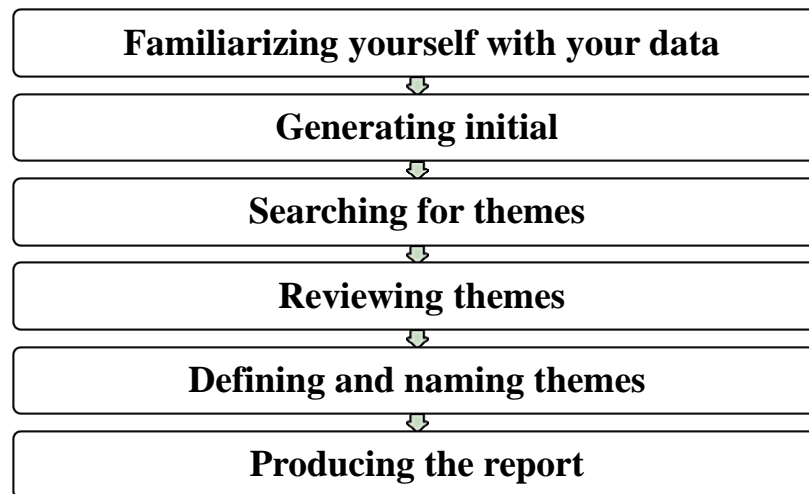
**Source:** elaborated by the student

## **b. Data analysis:**

### **b.1. Thematic analysis:**

Since the main objective of the research is to explore children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising, Thematic analysis was deemed most appropriate because of its compatibility with the study's overall methodological context, previous studies point out one key advantage of using this approach is allowing for the easy recognition of the patterns occurring within the data set subsequently the researcher will be able to structure a systematic comparison between the similarities and differences of the diverse ideas shared by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). In this study we opted for the thematic analysis process illustrated by (Lorelli S. Nowell et al, 2017), the process follows six main phases as shown in the figure below:

**Figure 3: thematic analysis process based on Braun & Clarke (2006) model**



Source: adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006) model

## **b.2. Application of Thematic Analysis:**

### **1. Familiarization with Data**

The process began with transcribing all the interviews collected for the study. This involved listening to the recordings multiple times and carefully typing out every word as it has been spoken in Darija. Once transcribed, all the transcripts were placed into a single sheet in an Excel spreadsheet. The transcripts were read multiple times to develop a general knowledge of the data, making initial notes and highlighting recurring ideas. This thorough review was essential for developing a deep understanding of the content and context of the data.

### **2. Generating Initial Codes**

Significant features of the data were systematically identified using the Excel spreadsheet. Each relevant segment of text was assigned a code, which was noted in the adjacent column within the spreadsheet. Segments were annotated to capture their essence, with all codes recorded in the same column. This manual coding process ensured a detailed and careful examination of the data.

### **3. Searching for Themes**

After coding the data, potential themes were identified by reviewing and grouping related codes. In the same Excel spreadsheet, new columns were created to collate these codes into broader categories. For instance, codes related to "ad recognition," "ad source," "ad definition," and "understanding selling intent" were grouped into a potential theme of "varied levels of advertising literacy." This step involved organizing the codes in a way that highlighted key aspects related to the research questions.

### **4. Reviewing Themes**

The identified themes were then reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the coded data. Initially, nine themes were identified. These themes were reduced for coherence and relevance, leading to the refinement of themes from nine to seven. This consolidation helped in focusing the analysis on the most significant patterns within the data.

### **5. Defining and Naming Themes**

Each theme was refined to clarify its specific meaning and significance. Clear and descriptive names were assigned to each theme. This careful definition and naming process ensured each theme was distinct and contributed uniquely to understanding the data.

### **6. Producing the Report**

The analysis was compiled into a coherent report. compelling extracts from the data were selected to illustrate each theme, and these examples after being translated to English were copied from the transcript into the report. These extracts provided concrete examples to support the analysis. This report was structured logically to guide the reader through the analysis, ensuring clarity and coherence.

This method's systematic approach allowed for the thorough identification and analysis of themes, despite the manual nature of the process. The use of Excel proved to be an effective tool for organizing and analyzing qualitative data.

This chapter has outlined the organizational context highlighting the significance of the study to protection consumer associations, in addition to that, it detailed the qualitative study including the tools used in data collection and thematic analysis. The remaining chapter will delve into the results of the analysis and its implication.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter will report the main findings concluded from applying thematic analysis to the data collected mentioned in the previous chapter. Their interpretations and how they connect to the past results found in the literature discussed in chapter one will also be detailed in a separate section.

## **I. Results:**

In this section, we will outline the findings from the conducted discussions, organized by the resultant themes and codes. Moreover, each code was supported by direct quotes, identifiers have been used while quoting the participants. Seven broad themes have emerged from the analysis paired with twenty-two codes as presented in the table in the appendix (Appendix D) displaying the code's frequency of appearance in the discussions. It must be noted that all themes were interlinked. From analyzing the data, children's online presence exposes them to targeted advertising, while their advertising literacy and privacy awareness varied, making their perceptions and attitudes diverse and rich.

### **1. Varied levels of advertising literacy:**

The first element examined in the discussion is advertising literacy, which led to the first theme emerging, which is varied levels of advertising. It groups most important indicators of digital advertising literacy including: Recognition of advertising, Recognition of Advertising's source, Definition of advertising and understanding the selling intent.

#### **a. Recognition of advertising:**

For the youngest group (8 to 9 years old), children did not identify the content as advertisements and instead described the images and videos they saw. Notably, one child did speculate when viewing a video featuring Sonic from the game. *"I swear, this is an ad!"*, participant D3 said.

In the 9 to 10 age group, children also failed to recognize ADs without AD disclosure, though they did describe the emotional appeal present visually, using expressions such as:

“She gifted her a sewing machine” (A7, Female)

“She didn’t gift it to her, but she sewed something and gifted it to her” (A5, Male)

*“Because her mother loves her”* (A1, Male)

*“Because the mother loves the daughter and takes care of her”* (A3, Male)

*“Because the mother's tenderness is irreplaceable”* (A2, Female)

However, when presented with ADs that included clear text indicating they were advertisements, children in this group were able to recognize them.

“This is an advertisement about the center.” (A7, female)

“This is a photo advertisement.” (A2, female)

“I found it; this man is announcing the opening of the karate hall.” (A1, male)

“This is an advertisement for school supplies discounts.” (A2, female)

“Five percent discount.” (A6, female)

The 10 to 11 age groups showed the ability to recognize all content as ADs, though those without AD disclosure required assistance and leading questions. First, they started describing the visual elements same as the youngest group.

*“Passion for sewing and love for this hobby.”* (E4, male)

*“Taking sewing as a future hobby.”* (E5, female)

*“Going to gift her mother.”* (B3, male)

*“Mother's love.”* (B1, male)

*"Filial piety."* (B3, male)

Then when asked about where is it possible to encounter the picture they recognized that it was an AD as well as the product marketed. Someone (B3, male) answered, *"Advertisement"* and was followed by another participant (B1, male) observing the message present in the AD. *"because 'buy' is written, it obviously looks like what would you see in a 'story' or something. .... Advertisement for a sewing machine or something."* and when asked How did he know that it's an advertisement. *"He's saying 'buy the domestic sewing machine' (pointing to the message)."*, he replied. Finally, children in the older age group (12 to 14 years) immediately recognized the content as advertisements and promotion of products giving similar answers using key terms, such as *"Promotion for a sewing machine (everybody agreeing)."* (F2, male)

#### **b. Recognition of Advertising's source:**

Another key factor of advertising literacy is the ability to recognize the source of the advertisements when asked about who do you think is making these ADs, most participants showed an understanding that advertisements are produced by companies and individuals with the intention of promoting products or services.

*"The companies specializing in these products."* (B1, male)

*"The inventor of advertisements is the large and big companies that have products that do not sell, so they invented advertisements to sell their products."* (B2, female)

*"The company that makes that product."* (C3, female)

*"The sellers."* (D3, male)

*"The sellers are selling and placing ADs so people buy."* (D4, male)

Few participants discussed the underlying process of creating an AD, acknowledging there is more than one side involved in creating these ADs.

*E5: The game maker called the photographer and said, "Hey, come and shoot an AD for this game."*

*E6: Paid advertisement.*

*E4: Just like when Coca-Cola tells YouTube.*

On the other hand, few participants within the first group 9 to 10 years old, gave uncertain answers when asked about who is asking people to buy the products in the messages appearing, some assumed that the characters present in the AD photos were the ones inviting people to buy.

*"The grandmother." (A4, male)*

*"The mother said to her daughter." (A5, male)*

*"No, the mother is advising this girl..... They saw them and then made similar ones so that people who see them would keep liking them and increase the number of fans" (A1, male)*

While one participant thought it was the followers of these Facebook pages. *"The followers are the ones who said "buy.""* A7 said.

### **c. Definition of advertising:**

Most children from all age groups when asked to define what an AD represents to them, gave similar answers highlighting a general understanding that advertisements are tools for promoting products and services, making them known to the public, and driving sales and profits for companies.

*“An advertisement in colloquial language means promoting something, like a sewing machine, football registrations, and many products.”* (B1, male)

*“An advertisement is the publication of many and diverse products to promote companies and stores. Thanks to advertisements, the product becomes famous and achieves significant profits.”* (B2, female)

*“It is a display shown in the media to present a new product and make a lot of money.”* (B6, male)

*“It is the display of products to enable companies to benefit from the profits.... They go and place advertisements, meaning to showcase the product.”* (C3, female)

*“Something shown on television, so when people see it and like it, they buy it.”* (D3, male)

In addition to these formal definitions, two children offered perspectives on their role in encouraging engagement with digital content *“Well, I don't know. Um, advertising encourages followers to either download that game or watch that video.”* A2 commented. While another in the context of YouTube channels described an AD as: *“It's defining a person's channel.”* A1 replied.

#### **d. Understanding the selling intent:**

This code reflects children's comprehension of the underlying purpose of advertisements, specifically their awareness that ADs are designed to promote consumption and generate revenue for the entities responsible for their creation, it could be considered as an extension of the previous codes putting more emphasis on children's perception of targeted advertising objectives.

Across the age groups examined, a consistent trend emerged indicating that the majority, if not all, of the children demonstrated an understanding of the selling intent behind advertisements. They recognized that ADs serve as persuasive tools aimed at enticing consumers to purchase products or services.

*“So they hurry up and buy them in large quantities to collect money.”* (A1, male)

*“The advertisement is to promote various products to attract people to them, like ADs for perfumes and clothes.”* (B7, female)

*“The aim of advertisements is to market to people and get them to buy these products, and for the fame of these products and stores and to bring people to them.”* (B3, male)

*“To expand fame.”* (E1, male)

*“To market this product.”* (E4, male)

While two participants discussed tactics used by marketers to attract customers.

B1: *“For making them fames, sometimes they do a raffle so people will buy them.”*

B3: *“For winning prizes and gifts.”*

While few participants from the third group discussion (12 to 13 years old) asked about the intent of specifically knowing our interest and using it to create personalized ADs. One noted *“To grab our attention.”* C3 answered, then continued: *“So that the view count increases.”*

However, the youngest participants did not answer the question, *“Honestly, I don't know.”* One participant (D4, male) replied while only one of them (D2, male) replied with *“For the money.”* In conclusion most participants did link profitability with creating ADs, while the youngest majority were not sure of the main objectives behind these ADs.

## **2. Age-Related Differences in Detecting Embedded Advertising:**

“Age-Related Differences in Detecting Embedded Advertising” became a notable theme appearing throughout the discussions, it reflects the varying levels of proficiency among children of different age groups in recognizing embedded advertising within digital content.

**a. Understanding the process of embedded advertising:**

The oldest children without any assistance were able to point out the products marketed within the videos using product endorsement and embedded advertising,

Interviewer: *“Did you notice something in the video?”*

C4: *“Advertising for Chocolate Optilla.”*

And when asked what did give it away, she continued: *“because it's placed throughout the entire video.”* Another participant (C3, female) added: *“It's used in the video, and it the results of using it are good, so viewers are encouraged to buy it”.*

Others discussed the process of collaborating with influencers to promote their products, highlighting the pre activities that precedes product endorsements.

F3: *“Yeah, like she got sponsored for making the video.”*

F2: *“Yeah, like he told you, she got a message to do so.”*

F1: *“they could tell her, for example, “Buy that chocolate and advertise it to me.”*

F5: *“no they do offer it for free”.*

F2: *“They could send her a request, saying, “If you collaborate with me in this video.””*

In the same vein, interestingly most children from one group of 10 to 11 years old displayed same level of understanding of the process as the older ones. Giving examples and thoughts on influencer marketing. One participant recalled the infamous Coca-Cola incident at a UEFA Euro 2020 press conference in June 2021, where Ronaldo removed two Coca-Cola bottles from view and held up a bottle of water, promoting healthier choices. This gesture led to a \$4 billion drop in Coca-Cola's market value, raising the question of why they lost the money. Another participant answered his question explaining the influence of famous people on their followers.

E2: *"Like when Ronaldo found Coca-Cola and water, he removed the Coke and took the water. Coca-Cola lost millions because of him, why! I don't know."*

E5: *"Because Cristiano Ronaldo prefers not to drink those beverages. Ronaldo is a role model."*

E2: *"But how did they lose the money? I don't know."*

E5: *"I'll tell you how they lost it. People who consider Cristiano a role model stopped drinking it, so Coca-Cola lost money."*

Later on in that discussion, the same participant that answered before added: *"as a matter of fact the producing companies target famous people to advertise for them so they become more famous."*

Highlighting the ongoing trend of using influencer marketing.

Few of the younger children from the first group noted the selling intent behind that kind of placement after being asked why is the product is present thorough the whole video without mentioning who is profiting from this advertisement.

A4: *"because, she (Um Walid) described it as good."*

A2: *"So her followers will buy it."*

#### **b. Advertising disguised as social content:**

In contrast to the code above, some of the participants did not show awareness of this kind of advertising, most of them described the content they watched without identifying the products marketed, during the video featuring "Um Walid" with Chocolate 'Optilla' product endorsement, they started naming recipe names, and when asked on why the product is present throughout the whole video, one participant (B3, male) answered: *"Because she got it from an advertisement she found."*

And while watching a collaborative AD between a popular basketball team player and an athletic shoe brand they argued on whether it is an advertisement but not in particular the shoes,

B1: *"Basketball training."*

B4: *"An advertisement for basketball."*

B1: *"No, for me, this is not an advertisement."*

B3: *"This is not an advertisement."*

B4: *"Training."*

B1: *"Basketball training"*

### **3. Children's online presence:**

along the discussions, children's online presence has been a reoccurring theme, participants were asked about their habitual use of the internet shedding light on the frequency and nature of their online activities. This inquiry delved into multiple aspects of their digital interactions, including preferred apps, social media usage, gaming habits, and their experience with digital advertising.

#### **a. Preferred apps:**

All of the participants were familiar with popular social media apps such as YouTube, TikTok however the majority preferred playing mobile and online games, one participant (D3, male) reported "I have both offline and online games. Do you know how many I have downloaded? about twenty games!"

While two other participants mentioned how early they have started playing games

*"I've been playing with the computer since I was one and a half years old."* (B5, male)

*"I've been playing these games since I was five years old."* (B1, male)

Another interesting remark made by 10-year-old girl (E6, female) regarding watching YouTube videos, noting her preference of regular YouTube platform over the YouTube kids' version because of the variation of the content present in comparison. *"I use YouTube, but I prefer the regular*

version over the kids' version. *It's for kids, for adults, anything you search for, you'll find.*", She said.

Likewise, when discussing the use of YouTube and TikTok with the third group (12 to 13 years old) they made a comparison of the existing content withing the apps, one expressing clear dislike of the TikTok content

Interviewer: *"What about TikTok?"*

(C3, female): *"I don't like it, it has poor content."*

(C4, female): *"The content on YouTube is suitable for our age."*

(C1, female): *"The content on YouTube is diverse and better."*

#### **b. Children's use of parental devices:**

This code groups in particular two main topics, children's use of digital devices and how they create accounts to access apps. The great majority of children did not own personal devices, getting access through their parents' phones, while only few claimed owning their personal devices,

*"I use my dad's phone. I ask for his permission first to use it to watch videos, take pictures, and play."* (A2, female)

*"I use my moms, my brother's, and my dad's accounts."* (A4, male)

*"I use my dad's iPhone. Sometimes I take it without him knowing, and the same goes for my mom's."* (A1, male)

*"I have my own device, no one plays with it"* (D4, male)

Regarding account creation, when inquired about how the participants were able to get their accounts. Some answered that an adult helped them register

A5: *"My brother made the account for me."*

Interviewer: *“How old is he?”*

A5: *“Eighteen.”*

Additionally, some participants mentioned using Gmail and Facebook accounts for registration, suggesting that they likely utilized the automated process provided by Google for account creation. This process simplifies registration by allowing users to sign up for new services or platforms using their existing Google credentials. Given that these accounts were accessed through their parents' devices, it's implied that they inherited or were granted access to these accounts.

### **c. Supervised:**

In regards to parental control systems, participants expressed opposing views, ranging from acceptance to expressing discomfort and resistance towards them. Several participants embraced parental monitoring as a manifestation of trust from their guardians. They perceived it as a means for parents to ensure their safety and offer guidance in navigating online spaces.

*“It's their right to know what we're watching....so, if it is something inappropriate, they would be made aware”* (D1, female)

*“It's a good thing when your parents monitor your accounts; you find someone who alerts you if something's wrong or not.”* (E6, female)

Addressing the same topic, some participants point out the existence of restrictions and rules to follow while being online.

*“My mom trust us; she tells us not to watch things that aren't appropriate.”* (B8, female)

*“My mom and dad tell me not to use Instagram, they tell me not to download these apps now until I am at my final year at high school.... They don't want us to fall behind in school. ....”* (C1, female)

*“When I'm alone, I watch YouTube Kids, and when mom and dad are with me, we watch regular YouTube.”* (E5, female)

On the other hand, certain participants voiced their discomfort to being monitored appreciating their privacy.

Interviewer: *“If your parents manage a control system, does it bother you or not? they are the only ones able to see what are you doing, what do you think about that?”*

A5: *“I’m not okay with it. Facebook is fine, but YouTube and TikTok, not so much. (giggles)”*

A2: *“I don’t let anyone. I have my aunts, and no one knows what’s on it.”*

Similarly, one participant (F1, male) stated: *“history, no I am not okay with that”*

#### **d. Experience with advertising:**

Children after confirming their frequent presence in the online environment, they reported frequent exposure to different kinds of advertisements, a few of the participants mentioned getting targeted with food advertising regularly including soft drinks,

*“Always Pepsi and Coca-Cola.”* (B3, male)

*“I only get Coca-Cola ADs.”* (E4, male)

*“I always find chocolate ADs.”* (E1, male)

*“You find cheese ADs.”* (F1, male)

And while talking about their behavioral responses to advertising A significant trend was identified among participants that consistently enjoyed playing games. While encountering ADs they showed impulsive tendencies by downloading or clicking on them without much thought,

*“I downloaded most of the games by clicking on ADs except two” (D3, male)*

*“If I encounter an AD of a game, I click to download it” (D4, male)*

*“Whatever AD I get exposed to, I click on it, it doesn’t matter what I am entering” (E1, male)*

*“Whenever I am playing games, I get ADs for other games then I go and chose one to download”  
(A2, female)*

#### **4. Limited understanding of datafication:**

This theme suggests children’s understanding of the process of datafication is limited, after analyzing the concept’s multiple dimensions during the discussions, the great majority of children had a basic level of awareness of its existence, but were not capable of drawing the full picture of the process. The theme consists of the following codes:

##### **a. Linking datafication to previous actions:**

When asked about why certain people would get content customized to their interest, some of the participants from varied age groups made the simple connection between previous actions made online and the content suggested from videos to ADs, linking it search history, liking videos and posts and following channels and pages.

*“What he watches a lot, what he searches for a lot, they show him videos based on that.” (A1, male)*

*“Most of the programs he watches have similar content.” (C3, female)*

*“He likes them, and after encountering an AD, he follows the channel, then they keep showing him a Sonic AD.” (E7, female)*

*“When you watch a lot of videos within the Algerian context, YouTube will prioritize that in its video recommendation” (F2, male)*

And one participant (B1, male) gave an example of his experience, *“Like, I'm a teacher, for example, and I want to follow the balloon a lot, I find it every time I enter YouTube, it shows me it right after in that YouTube stuff.”*

However, when questioned on the case of not following a channel and getting an AD for a game about a character you love participant contributed it to the popularity of the game, *“because the game is famous”* E6 replied, then asked about why would someone get personalized ADs based on location they linked it to using google account, and companies having access to this information.

E4: *“you are registered with Google account.”*

E2: *“they can have access to your computer.”*

E6: *“They can get your personal accounts.”*

#### **b. Awareness of user terms:**

Most children if not all displayed lack awareness of the terms and conditions associated with using online platforms or services. They did not comprehend the implications of agreeing to these terms, including how their data will be collected, used, and shared.

One girl (A2, female) thought user terms are a demonstration of how to use the app or play the game, *“yes, its how to use it”* answered. While others said they did not know what do they consist of since they are not the ones creating the accounts, *“I don't care, it wasn't me who created the account.”* E5 said, Then E6 added *“Me too, it was my mom's.”*

When asked about age limit of certain apps, few participants gave random numbers assuming it was for older children however they still used these apps,

interviewer: *“what is the age limit for playing free fire?”*

D3: *“Above seven years old, I think.”*

D4: *"Seventeen."*

D2: *"Above five years old."*

Few participants of the oldest group were aware of the terms but admitted to skipping through the privacy terms without fully understanding them with the reason of the length of the notice.

*"I don't read it, I skip it."* (F5, female)

*"I mean you find it too long to read, I skip to the bottom, then click to continue directly"* (F2, male)

### **c. Data collected:**

This element refers to two main aspects of children's perceptions regarding data collection, the first one being children's beliefs About data collection: This aspect covers what types of data children believe are being collected about them when they use online platforms and encounter targeted advertisements. Some children think their names and age which were given voluntarily plus preferences, and likes are being collected, however when it came to the collection of their location data. one child (C4, female) mentioned not being sure if it could be tracked: *"I don't know if they have it or not."* while the rest of the participants thought they do have this type of data, this led to another pointing out that using an incognito mode might prevent location tracking.

interviewer: *"So, we can control whether they know our location or not?"*

C3: *"You can use incognito mode."*

On the other hand, children's comfort with sharing data varied depending on how personal the information based on their perspectives, many children are okay with sharing their preferences and likes, but most are not comfortable with sharing their full names, family names, or pictures.

Interviewer: *"What kind of information should you normally share with apps, and what you don't consider okay to share?"*

B2: *"I don't share my age, parents' names, or photos."*

B8: *"Me too, I don't share photos or personal information like she said."*

#### **d. Language:**

It must be noted that most participants did not emphasize this point, it remains a significant aspect of their understanding of the datafication process, one child specifically mentioned that encountering privacy terms in French leads them to skip reading it altogether, as they find it difficult to understand. Referring to the challenge children face when interacting with online platforms that default to languages, they are less familiar with, such as French or English, rather than Arabic. In a related discussion about the language of user terms:

interviewer: *"Do you usually read them?"*

Bara: *"Never, they are written in French."*

Nada: *"You find them in French so you don't read them?"*

Bara: (nods yes) *"Sometimes in English."*

#### **e. Unclear about Data Destiny:**

Many participants were unsure or had misconceptions about where their data goes and who can see it. Some children mentioned that they believed their data was only accessible to people they know personally, such as their fathers, mothers, or peers who already have their full names.

A5: *"Whoever enters your profile can see your name."*

A1: *"Mom and Dad."*

A2: *"Anyone who knows your name."*

The older participants on the other side showed an understanding that companies do have access to their data but did not know about the ability of sharing their data with third party apps and sites,

Interviewer: *“so just Facebook, and let’s say the people who can access your account.”*

F1: *“Yeah, they have our number.”*

Interviewer: *“And other companies besides?”*

F2: *“They can’t.” (everybody agreeing)*

Interviewer: *“Like for example Techno.”*

F2: *“Except for that website where you put in the number, the data can’t get out.”*

F1: *“Like Free Fire.”*

## **5. Perception of personalized content:**

This theme revolves around children's perceptions of content tailored to their interests and preferences. through the course of the discussion’s children showed likeness of the personalized content and advertisement. They expressed satisfaction and excitement when encountering content that matched their hobbies and favorite activities.

### **a. Helpful:**

Some participants noted that profiling offers them an optimized experience, making it easier to search for content to consume in terms of time and the quality of what is being recommended.

*“It collects information about us to use it for making the search process easier for the person and provides them with new videos.” (B4, female)*

*“I like it when I don't have to make an effort, it finds things for me.” (C3, female)*

*“The thing you focus on is what you find afterward.”* (C1, female)

*“We benefit from these advertisements; if we like what they display, we go and buy them.”* (D1, female)

**b. Likeness of personalized content:**

While other participants highlighted the enjoyment derived from seeing ADs for products they like. They reported feeling pleased and excited when encountering advertisements that matched their interests.

*“I feel comfortable and happy watching them.”* (A2, female)

*“I would love them to buy it for me.”* (A3, male)

Another participant said it incites their curiosity to try the products, *“my curiosity increases to try using them”* C4 said. On the other hand, some expressed disappointment due to not getting recommended the content they love,

E2: *“Normally, I don't get the ADs I want. I want to get them, but they don't show up. Someone I know who loves PUBG get Free Fire ADs which he hates, but me who hates PUBG keeps getting its ads.”*

interviewer: *“You want to get Free Fire ADs instead?”*

E2: *“Yeah.”*

Interviewer: *“For example, if you get an AD for FIFA, would you like it or not?”* (to Alaa)

E1: *“I would immediately click on it to play. Look, once I got an AD for Free Fire, and I immediately threw the phone away.”*

Interviewer: *“Why?”*

E1: *“I hate Free Fire; I only like FIFA.”*

## 6. Distrust and Intrusiveness of Marketing:

In this theme, children's showed doubtfulness of marketing tactics, expressing their critical take on certain types of ADs and marketing techniques used, highlighting their perception of the truthfulness of the advertising's visual elements and messages.

### a. Skepticism of marketing tactics:

Interestingly, few participants from younger groups showed a pronounced skepticism towards implemented marketing strategies. When one girl within the first group expressed wanting to try drawing tools that she sees in ADs, one speculated the truthfulness of the pricing strategies made by luxurious brands pointing that it is a waste of money since there isn't much of a difference,

*"All coloring pallets are the same, you are just wasting money, just like TN, they claim to be worth fifty thousand dinars when probably the shoes I am wearing better"* (A1, male)

While few other participants referred back to their frustration with the incompatibility of their expectations before and after clicking on ADs questioning their truthfulness.

*"When I'm watching YouTube, an AD pops up that looks good from the outside. You enter it, and you find there's nothing; it's completely stupid."* (E7, female)

*"When I found that game in the ad, I liked it. But when I went to install it, it told me this game is not compatible with the account."* (D3, male)

Additionally, one participant warned about downloading apps from ADs suspecting them to be misleading or potentially harmful. *"If you start downloading from ads, you'll get viruses on your phone or computer."* D2 stated.

Despite this is not concerning a digital environment, some children reported their disappointment while buying promotional items, and explaining how this is a trick to provoke a purchase.

E5: *"La Vache Qui Rit, you never find prizes in it."*

E6: *"This is a trick. They're not really going to give you a prize. It's just to get people excited so they keep buying, but there's not even a prize."*

#### **b. Intrusive:**

Few children recalled their experience with particularly pop-up ADs that interrupt their activities. Many children find these ADs annoying and disruptive, expressing real anger and irritation. The constant interruption by pop-up ADs while playing games or using apps leads to a negative emotional response and impacts their overall online experience. they also provided certain traits that makes ADs annoying relating to the length and directness of the message.

Interviewer: *"What do you think of this type of advertisement?"*

E5 *"They annoy, they annoy a lot."*

Interviewer: *"Tell me why they annoy?"*

E5: *"They waste a lot of time talking nonsense, then they finally show you the game."*

Interviewer: *"Would you rather get used to that thing or hate it?"*

E5: *"I hate it."*

Interviewer: *"What do you think about advertisements?"* (to Rodina)

E6: *"Some ADs are short and quickly show you what they're about."*

## 7. Privacy appreciation:

The last theme that appeared consistently throughout the discussions is children's privacy appreciation demonstrated by them engaging in protective mechanisms to secure their personal information from unethical exploitation, however it was evident that their awareness and acknowledgement of their social privacy was more notable than commercial privacy.

### a. Engaging in protective mechanisms:

As children were asked on whether they create accounts using their real personal information, most participants answered with no due to them valuing their privacy, and expressing fear of leaking that information to people that may use it against them.

*"I didn't use my real name. I just entered 'Nada' My real name is 'Nada Rayhan', but I only entered 'Nada'" (A2, female)*

*"It is considered unsafe because it can leak your personal information that no one else is supposed to know. When I want to enter something, I use my aunt's information, for example, my aunt was born in 1984. I was born in June, so I put June 1984. My mom was born on December 25, I end up mixing up the information." (E5, female)*

One participant in particular told a story about how once she got a personalized message using her own name felt creepy that she immediately turned off the phone.

E8: *"Once I entered a website, I don't remember which one, and suddenly my name appeared. I got really scared, so scared that I just panicked, turned off my phone, and left."*

Interviewer: *"Was it on Google?"*

E8: *"Yes, it was on Google. I don't know how it happened. I found my name written there with some sort of an expression, I didn't understand what was that so I turned off my phone and left."*

In addition to that almost all participant admitted to alter their age in order to get access to the apps that are not allowed for younger users, lacking awareness about the implication of such a practice.

**b. Commercial privacy:**

The majority of participants felt comfortable sharing data online with companies, reasoning that since there are millions of users, the personal data collected won't stand out as unique. They also displayed trust in well-known sites and apps.

*"On the Internet, those websites don't know you personally other than social media." (C3, female)*

*"That's normal; they're the ones who care about it." (A5, male)*

*"It's normal for someone's vote to be like mine." (D1, female)*

*"Their work is documented, and people trust them a lot. Many people benefit from them without any problems." (F2, male)*

One participant highlighted the importance of knowing the source of the apps downloaded, *"You must know your game well. The game developer could be a hacker, like you're giving them personal information, they could hack your devices." (E2, male)*

**c. Social privacy:**

This code is highly connected to the two above, children when expressing their appreciation for privacy, it always implied to wanting to protect their social privacy rather than commercial privacy, when asked on why they give false information, the responses mostly indicated fear of unknown individuals potentially accessing their data, which could be exploited to cause harm to the participants.

*"So when I play with someone, they do not get to know me personally." (D3, male)*

*"It is something personal, and then someone may mess with my phone. That's why I don't like anybody touching my stuff." (D5, female)*

*"My own picture is okay to be shared but family's pictures are not, I fear if they get leaked." (B1, male)*

The results report has been a synthesis of the recurring patterns during discussions backed up with representative individual quotations present in their responses, aiming to provide an objective and concise summary of the main seven themes that will be explained and interpreted in the next section of the chapter.

## II. DISCUSSION:

During the analysis phase many significant findings have been discovered, some of them were expected while others were not anticipated. In this section we will go through the interpretations of the patterns identified above, highlighting the most important connections and how they compare to the previous findings discussed in the literature.

The seven themes cited in the above section are interlinked with highly complex relationships reflecting the depth of children's perceptions and attitudes, our research was in alignment with many previous research conducted despite the change in the geographical and cultural context implying that their perceptions could be related to their nature more than the nurturing environment, which shows children's comprehension of targeted advertising is not matured yet in terms of understanding the underlying process of profiling and personalization despite having a basic understanding of the selling intent, many participants were not aware of privacy terms displaying lack of care about commercial privacy in contrast showcasing high appreciation to their social privacy by engaging in protective mechanisms. children also highlighted certain traits that can determine their attitudes towards advertising such as the degree of personalization, informativeness, length and intrusiveness.

First, all of the children have been present online through a variety of channels and reported being exposed to different kinds of advertising and datafication practices however mostly using their caregivers' devices, some of the participants who reported having certain restrictions and using the internet under supervision, were not allowed to access content that may be inappropriate but not necessarily considering marketing content, this strengthens the point made by (Kennedy et al, 2019) that parents' consent may not be effective to protect children from susceptible marketing messages. on the other side, this signifies parents' mediation role in creating a safe online environment and educating their children.

In this study, participant's digital advertising literacy varied depending on mainly two factors: experience with digital advertising and age, while most were able to understand the selling intent of marketing strategies, most of the younger children struggled with recognizing advertising, more particularly the ones that may resemble social content, while older children showed a significantly

better performance at detecting promotional content and understanding the process of embedded advertising, this also can be seen in the duration of the discussions, older children were quick in giving answers while younger children needed more leading questions and assistance. This finding may be linked to the consumer socialization theory however the pattern cannot be described as linear, since some children of the same age group showcased different levels of advertising literacy. Furthermore, in alignment with Ayse Bengi et al. (2018) and Srivastava et al. (2023), some children same as adults perceive personalized messages positively, finding them helpful and even influencing their purchase decisions. This notes the role that personalized advertising plays in shaping children's consumer behaviors and ethical considerations in targeting such vulnerable demographics.

Our findings also concur with previous research in relation to children's take on online privacy, Akin to Stoilova et al.'s (2019) and Srivastava et al. (2023) studies, one participant found customized messages creepy but it was associated with fear of invading their social privacy rather than being aware of their commercial privacy, this contrast was consistently present in children's responses expressing appreciation of their social privacy, while not paying any critical evaluation of commercial privacy. In addition to that, this study was in agreement with the Research conducted by De Pauw et al. (2017) demonstrating that children's recognition of targeted advertising doesn't imply their awareness of the underlying process, most participants were not aware of user terms and privacy policies nor did they show interest in learning about them, this reflects the "privacy paradox," where children want access to online content and services, often ignoring the privacy terms to do so. The language and length of privacy agreements also present significant challenges to their understanding.

Finally, based on the findings, children's understanding of the broad picture of targeted advertising remains highly limited and influenced by many factors such as experience, age and parents mediation, this puts emphasis on the ethical responsibility of marketers and policymakers to ensure transparent and age-appropriate communication of privacy terms and advertising practices prioritizing children's skills and comprehension capacity as well as their susceptibility. taking into consideration that children may not always be supervised a responsible caregiver, placing effective protective ecosystem to safeguard their privacy and overall well-being.

This chapter was designed to clearly present the results of the focus group discussions and reflect the main findings on children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising against the literature to see how it builds on the existing evidence as well as how it could be approached in the following research addressing topics related to marketing to children in an online environment.

# **CONCLUSION**

This study explores children's Perceptions and Attitudes towards Targeted Advertising, specifically in the suburban area of Mila - Oued Endja- , Algeria. This research is significant due to the increasing ethical concerns about children's privacy and health in the digital age. The study aims to provide valuable insights for marketing ethics, highlighting the need for regulatory systems and businesses to adopt ethical practices that protect children's rights from exploitation and misuse.

The main objectives of this research were to investigate children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising and to assess their awareness of online privacy issues. The research problem addressed the gap in understanding how children recognize and respond to targeted advertising, as well as their awareness of data collection practices associated with these ads.

Specifically, the research addressed the following questions:

1. How does children's level of advertising literacy impact their ability to identify and resist persuasive tactics employed in targeted online advertising?
2. How aware are children of their online privacy, including data collection practices?
3. How does exposure to targeted advertising influence children's product desire, brand attitude, and purchase intentions?

A qualitative approach was employed, consisting of six focus group discussions with children aged 8 to 14 years in Oued Endja, Algeria. This methodology was chosen to gain in-depth insights into children's thoughts and attitudes. The thematic analysis of these discussions provided a nuanced understanding of the variations in advertising literacy and privacy awareness among the participants. The primary research tools used in this study were focus group discussions and thematic analysis. These tools helped in exploring the children's ability to recognize ads, understand the intent behind them, and their awareness of privacy issues.

The results indicated significant age-related differences in advertising literacy. Younger children struggled to recognize ads, especially those embedded within social content, while older children were better at identifying promotional content and understanding advertising intent. The study also found a general lack of awareness about online privacy and data collection practices among children, with many neglecting privacy terms despite their desire for online access—a phenomenon known as the "privacy paradox."

Moreover, exposure to targeted advertising significantly influenced children's product desires, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Personalized messages were perceived positively by some children but seen as intrusive by others, particularly concerning social privacy. This dual perception underscores the ethical responsibility of marketers and policymakers to ensure transparent, age-appropriate advertising practices.

To conclude, addressing the limitations of this study and exploring further research areas are essential. The study was based on a specific geographical context in a suburban area of a developing country, which may influence children's socioeconomic status and technical skills. Future research should consider these factors and expand the study to diverse contexts. Additionally, the impact of language and the length of privacy terms on children's awareness of commercial privacy should be examined more thoroughly.

Future Research Recommendations:

1. Development of a digital advertising literacy scale for children.
2. Examination of gender influences on online privacy perceptions among children.
3. Conducting quantitative studies to explore the relationships between advertising literacy, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions in the context of targeted advertising.

This study contributes significantly to the field of marketing ethics by providing valuable insights into children's perceptions and attitudes towards targeted advertising. The findings offer essential information for regulatory systems and businesses to adopt ethical practices, ensuring the protection of children's rights in the digital age.

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## **APPENDIX A: focus group discussion guide**

مناقشة مجموعة التركيز.

ترحيب + قواعد الحديث

فكرة عامة عن الموضوع دون استعمال كلمات تؤثر على تفكير المشاركين

مشاهدة الفيديو

عرض الصور

**التعرف على الاعلان**

ماذا تمثل هذه الصور؟

هل صادقت هذا النوع من الاعلانات من قبل و في اي منصة ؟

ماهو رايكم بهذا النوع من الاعلانات ( مزعج، تافه، ممل، مثير للفضول، مثير للاعجاب .....)

نشاط: ربط الاعلان بالشخصية التي تلقتة

**الخصوصية**

لماذا برايكم كل شخصية تلقت اعلان مختلف ؟

من تعتقدون قام بصناعة هذا الاعلان و كيف ادرك اهتمامات الشخص المتلقي له؟

عرض بعض شروط الاستخدام ماذا تعتقدون ( الخصوصية، السن، نوع المعلومات التي تجمع)

ماذا تشعرون حول مشاركتكم هذه المعلومات و هل هناك معلومات لا تشعرون بالراحة لمشاركتها ؟

هل ضبط نظام مراقبة الاباء يشعركم براحة وامن اكثر ام العكس؟

**اثر الاعلان الموجه**

ماهي اهداف هذه الاعلان و كيف تعتقدون سوف يكون راي الشخصيات بالمنتجات المعلنة و لماذا؟

ماذا سوف يهم هذه الشخصيات في هذه الاعلانات من معلومات ؟

كيف سوف يكون تصرف هذه الشخصيات بعد مشاهدة الاعلان ؟

**اختتام:**

شكراً لمشاركتكم القيمة في هذه المناقشة. إذا كان لديكم أي أسئلة أو تعليقات، فلا تترددوا في طرحها. ونتمنى أن تستمتعوا وتستفيدوا من فترة التواصل

## **APPENDIX B: Materials used in focus group discussion**



Videos used in the focus group discussions:

<https://youtu.be/In7SZeSmEwk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOhpidoQM38>

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C5eVPqjRCUm/>

## **APPENDIX C: consent form**



المدرسة عليا لادارة الاعمال

تخصص: ادارة تسويق

يجري الباحث: زعباط ندى طالبة ماستر من المدرسة العليا للمناجنت القليعة دراسة حول **أخلاقيات الإعلان المستهدف عبر الإنترنت نحو الأطفال** و ذلك من اجل الحصول على درجة ماستر في تخصص ادارة تسويق.

وتهدف الدراسة الحالية الوصول إلى نتائج تمكن الباحث من فهم تأثير الإعلانات المستهدفة عبر الإنترنت على استيعاب الأطفال ومواقفهم وسلوكياتهم. تتضمن الأهداف تقييم فهم الأطفال لنية الإعلان، وقياس تأثير الإعلانات المستهدفة على رغبتهم في المنتجات ومواقفهم تجاه العلامات التجارية، وتقييم الوعي بتداعيات الخصوصية عبر الإنترنت. كما يستكشف البحث دور الثقافة الإعلانية في توسيع الآثار وينظر في كيفية تشكل التطور الإدراكي استجاباتهم. تلك الأهداف أساسية لتوجيه السياسات والاستراتيجيات لحماية رفاهية الأطفال في الفضاءات الرقمية، مؤكدة على ضرورة حمايتهم من المخاطر المحتملة بينما تعزز مهارات التفكير النقدي والوعي بالخصوصية.

عزيزي ولي الأمر،

أطلب من حضرتكم الموافقة على مشاركة (ابنكم/بناتكم) في بحثي الذي أقوم به حيث انه مطلوب منه القيام بالمهام الأنشطة الآتية:

- طبيعة النشاطات التي سيقوم بها الطفل ،مناقشة مجموعة التركيز، مشاهدة فيديوهات، صور و التعليق عليها .
- المدة الزمنية التي تستغرقها الدراسة ومدة النشاطات التي سيقوم بها الطفل : 60-90 دقيقة.
- سوف يتم تسجيل الجلسات سمعية و مرئية .

يرجى العلم بأنه لن يتمكن أي شخص من الاطلاع على البيانات الصوتية و المرئية التي سيتم جمعها حول طفلك إلا الباحث، المشرف و اعضاء لجنة المناقشة ، وأنه في نهاية الدراسة سيتم تقديم ملخص جماعي لنتائج الأطفال المشاركين في هذه الدراسة، بحيث يتمكن أي ولي أمر من الوصول إلى هذه النتائج إن رغب بذلك. وإن كنت ترغب بالحصول على ملخص النتائج يرجى الإشارة إلى ذلك في نهاية هذه النموذج مع كتابة عنوان بريدك الالكتروني.

كما يرجى العلم أن مشاركة طفلك في هذه الدراسة طوعية وأنه على الرغم من موافقتك بإمكان الطفل رفض المشاركة، وإنه في حال عدم موافقتك أو عدم موافقة طفلك فإنه لن يترتب على ذلك أي نتائج متعلقة بطبيعة الخدمات المقدمة لطفلك.



المدرسة عليا لإدارة الأعمال

تخصص: إدارة تسويق

يرجى اختيار رغبتك أو عدمها بشأن مشاركة طفلك في هذه الدراسة من خلال اختيار أحد الخيارين الآتيين وتوقيع النسختين وإعادة واحدة للباحث مع الاحتفاظ بالنسخة الثانية لأغراض التوثيق.

نعم أوافق على مشاركة (طفلي / طفلاتي) في هذه الدراسة، وأشهد بأن مشاركته / ها كانت بطريقة طوعية

لا أوافق على مشاركة (طفلي / طفلاتي) في هذه الدراسة

اسم ولقب لولي أمر الطفل: ..... توقيعه: ..... التاريخ: / / 20

اسم الطفل: .....

نعم أراغب بالحصول على نسخة عن نتائج الدراسة على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني التالي: .....

في حال وجود أية استفسارات يرجى التواصل مع:

اسم الباحث: زعياط ندى رقم الهاتف: البريد الإلكتروني: nadazabat@gmail.com

اسم المشرف على البحث: البروفيسور زروتي مسعود

اسم الجهة الداعمة: المنظمة الجزائرية لحماية وارشاد المستهلك ومحيطه APOCE

## **APPENDIX D: thematic analysis results**

		FREQUENCY						
THEME	CODES	FGD1	FGD2	FGD3	FGD4	FGD5	FGD6	TOTAL
Varied levels of advertising literacy	Recognition of advertising	6	3	1	1	3	2	15
	Recognition of ad source	5	3	1	1	1	0	11
	Definition of advertising	1	3	1	1	0	0	6
	Understanding the selling intent	3	5	1	3	5	0	17
Age-Related Differences in Detecting Embedded Advertising	understanding the process of embedded advertising	1	0	1	0	4	4	10
	Advertising disguised as social content	1	4	1	1	0	0	7
Children's online presence	Preferred apps	3	2	2	3	1	1	12
	Children's use of parental devices	1	1	0	2	0	0	4
	Supervised	3	5	1	1	2	1	13
	Experience with advertising	3	4	2	5	6	1	21
Limited understanding of datafication	Linking to previous actions	4	4	2	1	2	2	15
	Awareness of user terms	2	4	1	1	1	1	10
	Data collected	1	0	2	1	1	3	8
	Language	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
	Unclear about Data Destiny	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
Perception of personalized content	Helpful	0	2	1	3	0	1	7
	Likeness of personalized content	5	1	2	5	2	0	15
Distrust and Intrusiveness of Marketing	Skepticism of marketing tactics	1	0	0	3	2	0	6
	Intrusive	1	0	0	2	6	1	10
Privacy appreciation	Social privacy	3	1	2	3	2	2	13
	Commercial privacy	1	0	3	3	2	3	12
	Engaging in protective mechanisms	2	5	0	3	3	1	14

- Excel sheet of the Thematic analysis of the transcripts:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1H263FXkEUUsd4hDUFff2U-SvacChPA1Adpstt9R0Uw0/edit?usp=sharing>