

# Teens and screens:

Exploring the relationship between 10 to 16 year-olds and advertising.

# MediaSmart

Education from the Advertising Industry

Today's media landscape is in constant flux, and young people are exposed to more online advertising than ever before. Media Smart teamed up with youth centred creative business, Livity, to commission and conduct this report, which dives into the digital behaviours of 10 to 16 year-olds today.

Media Smart is the award-winning, non-profit education programme from the advertising industry.

Our mission is to ensure that every child in the UK, aged 7 - 16, can confidently navigate the media they consume including being able to identify, interpret and critically evaluate all forms of advertising.

We saw an opportunity to explore the topic of teaching advertising literacy among young people. The aim? To uncover their true understanding of digital advertising, find out the things they need extra support with, and establish what they need to stay safe online.

## 1. How did Media Smart approach this report?

Media Smart recruited a number of young people in the UK, and had their parents or guardians take part too. They fell into two age categories (10 to 12 and 13 to 16), and these were broken down further by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and location.

From here, the findings were used to run a series of focus groups. In this setting, we could tease out richer, more detailed responses, and start testing the educational materials on advertising that is already available. In short, they allowed us to really understand why our participants felt the way they did.

Alongside this research, our team also spoke to a range of Media Smart's industry partners, supporters and stakeholders to hear their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities presented by youth advertising literacy education.



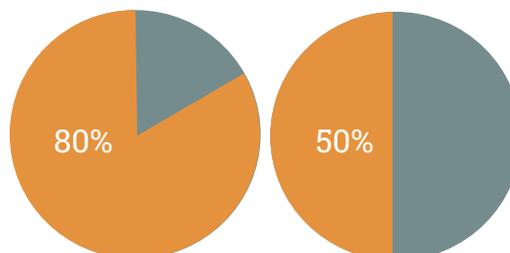
To begin with, the young people were introduced to digital diaries. These helped monitor their online behaviours and keep track of the adverts they were seeing.



Alongside regular conversations with a moderator, the diaries enabled us to delve deeper into how each member of the group interacted with online ads.



Ultimately, this part of the research also established some key facts:



80% of the 13-16s were more likely to buy a product promoted by an influencer, compared to 50% of the 10-12s. In fact, the 10-12s were not able to distinguish between adverts and non-adverts, or determine the purpose of an ad.



## 2. What did Media Smart find?

We found that there is definitely a need for more 'niche' focus in schools on media literacy for 10-16 year-olds.

This tells us that regular and specific conversations with young people should happen. Particularly on topics like body image, advertising and influencer content.



We can do this by developing educational materials that help young people navigate the ever changing digital landscape and by increasing awareness of Media Smart's resources among schools and parents.



“Another challenge, particularly in the social media space, is when the 'advertising' is harder to distinguish; education in this space is critical to protecting youth audiences.”

- Industry Partner

We found that the younger age group are more concerned about what is “safe” whilst the older group worry about what is “real”.

This tells us critical thinking around advertising messaging is a key skill to be taught, and safety and media literacy needs to be made more of a priority.

We can do this by partnering with brands to campaign existing safety features and educational resources in an engaging way.

“This space is constantly changing so it's hard to make it future-proof.”

- Industry Partner



We found that keeping up with the digital landscape is a real challenge.

This tells us we need to meet young people on the platforms they know and love, and by naturally incorporating education around advertising into the content they consume.

We can do this by partnering with key platforms (check out our TikTok 'Adverts, Creators and You' resources), and by gaining more industry support for Media Smart, which will help us to understand the trends and monitor changing behaviours.



We found that the importance of entertainment in online safety and media literacy is being overlooked.

This tells us that we can spark behaviour change in young people through the online spaces they enjoy spending time on as well as through traditional education routes.

We can do this by teaming up with brands and influencers on platforms where young people consume the most adverts, and work together to improve their digital literacy skills.

## Finally, what next?

We all have a responsibility to ensure young people are safe online and advertising literate. Ready to be part of it? Support Media Smart by spreading the word about our free resources ([download them here](#)) and using your communication channels to promote and educate young people directly.

You can also join us as an industry partner - just email Rachel Barber-Mack, Director of Media Smart, at [mediasmart@adassoc.org.uk](mailto:mediasmart@adassoc.org.uk).