

**TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MEDIA USAGE AND  
THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING-IN-GENERAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Youth is one of the most valued and ever growing consumer segments in today's market place. To get the word into their minds through various media channels is becoming more and more paramount for the advertisers. Considering their growing media usage and their exposure to increasing numbers of advertising messages, to examine the relation between their media usage and their attitude toward advertising is worth the effort. This study is intended to accomplish this end. A total of 262 Bahcesehir University students were chosen by convenience sampling method. The results of the Regression and T-Test analysis presented that media usage has a minimal contribution to the attitudes toward advertising in general.*

**Keywords:** *advertising in general, attitudes, media usage.*

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## INTRODUCTION

A while ago, Mittal (1994: 8) claimed that advertising was in crisis and exposed his findings on negative public assessment of advertising. Early researches with the student samples about their attitudes toward advertising in general do not point to a reverse direction. Haller (1974) found that general university students think of advertising as a necessity at all. Larkin (1977) concluded that college students are highly critical of advertising and have anti-advertising attitudes. Andrews (1989) revealed that marketing students strongly criticize the social effects of advertising. Pollay and Mittal (1993) provided that the majority of the college students have serious reservations for advertising – about its negative cultural and societal effects, its economic and personal value. Beard (2003) stressed that students are still as negative as they were in the past toward advertising. However, scarcity of research on the attitudes of students toward advertising over the last two decades preserves the assumption that their attitudes may be different from their peers of 20 years ago. The increasing degree of advertising in youth's life, proliferation of media channels and young generations' increasing media usage may create a divergence from the past findings on attitudes toward advertising in general among youth population.

Youth is one of the most valued consumer segments in today's market place, because they have the power to influence wider audiences with their perception of trends and their courage to initiate them. Hobsbawn emphasized another aspect youth and stated "Youth has become an independent group. This group is a concentrated mass of purchasing power and this is because each new generation of adults was socialized in a self-conscious youthful culture" (cited in Cunha, 2009). For countries like Turkey where nearly 20% of the population is between 15-25 age (Turkey Pocket Money Research, 2010), to understand the young consumers is an important asset for marketers and advertisers. Given that media can help change beliefs and behavior (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998), to examine the media usage among Turkish youth and its relation to their attitudes toward advertising in general may provide useful insights.

This study aims at a specific segment of youth, namely university students. They are selected for several reasons;

- 1) This particular portion of the youth population is at a point in life when for the most people seeking and finding their permanent identity is paramount. Media is their way out to new trends and lifestyles. Therefore, this community of trend seeking and often trend setting consumer group is exposed to intensive advertising in their quest for identity.

- 2) This group will shortly be involved in professional life where they will experience upward mobility in terms of income. They will be the decision makers of the near future. To understand the relation, if any, between their media usage and perception of advertising is very important both for the industry and the academy.

Research on the media consumption in the United States indicates that American youth devote more time to media than to any other waking activity, as much as one-third of each day (Roberts, 2000). Nielsen (2009) reported that American youth's (18-24 age) average internet usage is over 14 hours per month and the

trend is increasing every year. Toruk (2008), in his analysis of Turkish youth's media consumption, indicated that television and internet are the two most widely used medium among university students.

The main objectives of this paper are to examine the current beliefs and attitudes of university students toward advertising in general and to explore the relationship between the media usage of the university students and their attitudes toward advertising in general.

Since the majority of the earlier data is collected from the student populations in the North American-European mainstream, this paper may also present new directions by shedding light on the students' media usage and their attitudes toward advertising in another setting, in our case Turkey.

## **ATTITUDE TOWARD ADVERTISING IN GENERAL**

McKenzie and Lutz (1989: 53) defined attitude toward advertising in general as "a learned predisposition to respond in consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general". Considerable research has emphasized the construct of attitude towards advertising in general and developed models to examine its underlying antecedents (Bauer & Greyser, 1968; Sandage & Leckenby, 1980; Lutz, 1985; Muehling, 1987; Andrews, 1989; Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Shavit, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998; Mehta, 2000, Beard, 2003, Dutta-Bergman, 2006; Petrovici & Paliwoda, 2007).

The roots of the literature on attitude toward advertising goes back to Bauer and Greyser (1968) who executed the first systematic academic work on the subject. They examined advertising by establishing a relationship between consumers' attitude toward advertising and their evaluation of specific ads through belief statements. Their work has shown that advertising in general involves various dimensions and serves economic and social functions.

Sandage and Leckenby (1980: 30) have suggested a differentiation between two components of attitudes toward advertising: *institution* and *instrument*. Advertising as institution represents various roles advertising play for the society in general and is defined through advertising's purpose and effects. Advertising as instrument corresponds to its implementational elements, hence the practices and methods. Sandage and Leckenby (1980) theorized that both dimensions influence global attitudes toward advertising. Nevertheless, a broader explanation for the attitudes toward advertising cannot be provided without the examination of the beliefs about advertising.

Fishbein (cited in O'Keefe 2002: 53), in his summative model of attitude, claimed that one's attitude toward an object is a function of one's beliefs about the object. In his view, attitudes emanate from beliefs. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1980), a belief connects an object (e.g., advertising) with an attribute (e.g., advertising results in better products for the public). In that sense, an attribute can be seen as a summary of the feelings leading to it (Olson & Kendrick, 2008: 111). Therefore, the attitudes toward advertising in general cannot be examined without taking into account the influence of the feelings about advertising. Within this perspective, the predispositions as well as the attitudes of Turkish students toward advertising in general will also be examined in this paper.

In recent years, questions concerning the cross-national applicability of these belief measures and attitude models had been raised by various researchers (Durvasula, Andrews, Lysonski, & Netemeyer, 1993; Andrews, Durvasula, & Netemeyer, 1994; Zinkhan & Balazs, 1998; Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Ashill & Yavas, 2005). Durvasula, Andrews, Lysonski, and Netemeyer (1993: 635) had found that opinions about advertising show diversity on country basis. These variations were thought to have a connection with differences in “advertising intensity, executional styles, norms of acceptability in advertising, and cultural backgrounds” (ibid.) in countries under scrutiny. Andrews, Durvasula, and Netemeyer (1994: 81) claimed that Russians perceived advertising in general more positively than their US counterparts. Ashill and Yavas (2005: 346) concluded that consumers in New Zealand and Turkey had predispositions on the believability of advertising, hence should be regulated and controlled. Since the American-European research dominates the investigation of the attitudes toward advertising in general, such cross-cultural validations of models already in use and the insights reflecting other geographies and cultures with different economic background, political climate and media usages are important in terms of the extension of the academic knowledge on the subject. Within this framework, this exploratory study among students in Turkey may also present useful implications for further cross-cultural literature and contributions for bridging the gap.

## **MEDIA USAGE**

Since people’s most encounters with advertising are through offline and online media channels, the mass media are assumed to play an important role in the construction of people’s attitude towards advertising as *institution* and as *instrument* which constitute main dimensions of advertising in general. The term media usage takes various different names as media exposure, media consumption, media appropriation. Its definition also varies across different studies on media effects, media habits, media planning, consumer behavior, purchase intentions, attitudes, etc.

Media usage is mostly operationalized as the amount of time each person spent with each media form on daily basis (Roberts, 2000; Schultz, Pilotta, & Block, 2006). In recent years, with the fragmentation of the media environment, increase in the number of media alternatives for people’s limited time; media consumption and planning researchers started to consider more complex media usage models involving further elements like simultaneous media usage defined as “individual consumers being exposed to more than one media system or approach at a single point in time” (Pilotta, Schultz, Drenik, & Rist, 2004). Shultz, Pilotta, and Block (2006) presented a four legged media consumption model comprised of (1) the amount of time each person spent with each media form by day-part, (2) the amount of simultaneous media usage (multi-tasking) that occurred, (3) the various media combinations attended to and (4) the impact of the synergy or media interactions at the consumer level. However, these antecedents – as may be seen – are not developed at the expense of the single media usage but in addition to it. Therefore, single media usage preserves its centrality in understanding people’s media consumption.

Part of the media usage research literature draws on Katz's (1954) "uses and gratifications theory" to explain individuals' media behavior (Dou, Wang, & Zhou, 2006; Roe & Minneboe, 2007). The theory assumes that individuals use media for their specific purposes and in order to satisfy their psychological and social needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurewitch, 1974; McQuail & Windahl, 1981; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985). In that sense, media content or the medium itself fulfill a number of functions for the individual using them or exposed to them;

To match one's wits against others, to get information and advice for daily living, to provide a framework for one's day, to prepare oneself culturally for the demands of upward mobility, or to be reassured about the dignity and usefulness of one's role (Palmgreen et al.: 20).

Advertising, being infused in different media content (ie. product placements) and using mass media to reach the intended audience, provides an outlet to gratify one's above described needs by providing useful news and information, presenting symbolic and cultural contents, entertaining and creating social connections and interactions. Therefore, Turkish youth's media usage can be worth examining to assess its attitude towards advertising in general.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Model***

The attitudes of today's university students toward advertising social and economical functions and their beliefs behind them may be different from those studied earlier and in other geographies and cultures. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate current attitudes of university students in Turkey toward advertising in general. It relies significantly on previous research on attitudes toward advertising by way of incorporating Sandage and Leckenby's measurement of advertising as *institution* and as *instrument* with Bauer and Greyser's measurement of belief statements.

The second emphasis of this study is to inspect university student's media usage and its relation to their attitudes toward advertising in general. However, the purpose here was not to attempt an all-encompassing proof of the relationship between media usage and attitudes toward advertising in general, but to explore a case consisting of the use of certain media by a specific youth segment in order to see whether such research would provide a starting point for further hypotheses on the effects of public's media usage on the attitudes toward advertising. In that respect; television, internet and radio usages will be examined.

In parallel with the aim of this study following research questions regarding the beliefs and attitudes toward advertising in general and the differences in these attitudes as a function of media usage:

**Q<sub>1</sub>:** What are the attitudes of Turkish university students toward advertising in general?

**Q<sub>2</sub>:** Do media usage have an effect on the attitudes of Turkish university students toward advertising in general?

In relation with the research questions, self administered survey model was employed to collect the relevant data.

### **Sample**

The universe of the study is 3 million students in Turkey who are currently enrolled to private and state universities (Turkey Pocket Money Research, 2010). To examine the research questions, relevant data were collected from a convenience sample of the graduate and undergraduate students of Bahçeşehir University.

### **Data Collecting and Analysis**

The survey was pre-tested on 20 students and revised according to their feedbacks. Before the administration of the questionnaire, it was first translated into Turkish by a bilingual expert, then back-translated into English to prevent the errors of meaning. Two interviewers distributed and collected a total of 268 questionnaire forms during different undergraduate and graduate classes. 262 questionnaires were used for the analysis.

The questionnaire included 3 parts:

1) A two-part question about students' overall attitude toward advertising in 5-point Likert scale (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998). Respondents were first asked whether they generally like or dislike advertising and then assess the degree of liking/disliking. Secondly, eight 5-points Likert-type statements were incorporated to measure their attitude toward the two different components of advertising (Sandage & Leckenby, 1980): advertising as *institution* (good/bad, strong/weak, valuable/worthless and necessary/unnecessary) and advertising as *instrument* (clean/dirty, honest/dishonest, sincere/insincere and safe/dangerous).

2) Next, seven out of eight belief statements of Bauer and Greyser (1968) were integrated to evaluate advertising students' belief toward advertising in general. Last item ("standards of advertising as compared to ten years ago") was left out due to the reservations voiced by Andrews (1989) (e.g. the length of the item and the difficulty to decide the dimension it belongs— economic or social).

3) Finally, questions about the amount of media usage were asked for each of the following medium: Radio, TV and Internet. The media usage was assessed on the single point-in-time media exposure basis. It was measured by asking the respondents to indicate his or her average daily media usage (in minutes) for each single medium and then they were requested to specify how many days per week they used such medium. And finally, a total amount of average media usage per week for each student was calculated.

In this study, university students' attitude toward advertising in general was set as the dependent variable and their amount of media usage (Radio, TV, Internet), their beliefs toward advertising and finally their attitude toward advertising as *instrument* and *institution* were measured as independent variables.

In regard to the first research question, all descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables were stated (Table 1 & Table 2). To address the second research question - the effect of media usage on the attitude toward advertising - a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. A total of 4 independent variables (media usage, beliefs about advertising, attitude toward advertising as *institution* and *instrument*), grouped in four separate blocks were included in the analysis (Table 3). In the first stage of the regression analysis, media usage was entered. After that, beliefs toward advertising in general, attitude toward advertising as *institution* and as *instrument* were entered as variables in the respective order.

After performing a regression analysis, in order to inspect the deeper effects of media usage an additional T-test analysis was conducted (Table 4). The analysis was intended to demonstrate whether the media usage creates a significant change in the attitudes toward advertising in general, attitude toward advertising as *instrument* and *institution* and beliefs toward advertising.

## FINDINGS

University students' attitudes toward advertising in general reflect a neutral picture ( $\bar{X}=3.38$ , midpoint of the scale = 3). In terms of the dimensionality of the attitudes, consistent with findings of Sandage and Leckenby (1980) and Muehling (1987) attitudes toward the *institution* of advertising (as measured by the 5 item scale,  $\bar{X}=3.77$ ) are higher than attitudes toward advertising as *instrument* ( $\bar{X}=2.67$ ).

**TABLE 1: Mean Ratings of the Attitudes and Beliefs toward Advertising**

	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>ATTITUDE IN GENERAL</b>	<b>262</b>	3.38	1.02
<b>ATTITUDE-INSTITUTION</b>			
Advertising is Good / Bad	262	3.60	1.05
Advertising is Strong / Weak	262	4.07	0.96
Advertising is Valuable / Worthless	262	3.41	1.01
Advertising is Necessary / Unnecessary	262	4.02	1.04
<b>Summative Index</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>0.77</b>
<b>ATTITUDE-INSTRUMENT</b>			
Advertising is Clean / Dirty	262	2.91	0.85
Advertising is Honest / Dishonest	262	2.28	0.95
Advertising is Sincere / Insincere	262	2.31	0.98
Advertising Safe / Dangerous	262	3.17	0.95
<b>Summative Index</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.68</b>

Belief items manifest neutral, at times negative results in terms of the perception of advertising. At one end students believe that “advertising is essential” ( $\bar{X}$ =4.08), at the other they seem to have reservations for it. Especially, mean scores of the belief statements emphasizing economic implications of advertising (i.e. “advertising results in lower prices”,  $\bar{X}$ =2.41; “advertisement helps to raise our standard of living,  $\bar{X}$ =2.77) may be taken as an indicator of such reservation. Moreover, the results point to a distrust toward advertising from the part of the students which reveals itself in the scores of the belief statements like “advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn’t buy” ( $\bar{X}$ =3.58) and “advertising presents a true picture of the product being advertised” ( $\bar{X}$ =2.61).

**TABLE 2: Mean Ratings of the Advertising Attitudes and Beliefs**

<b>BELIEF ITEMS</b>			
	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Advertising is essential	262	4.08	0.82
Most advertising insults the intelligence of the average consumer.	262	2.97	0.96
In general, advertising results in lower prices.	262	2.41	0.86
Advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn’t buy.	262	3.58	1.01
In general, advertisements present a true picture of the product being advertised.	262	2.61	0.93
Advertising helps to raise our standard of living.	262	2.77	0.96
Advertising results in better products for the public.	262	3.07	1.07
<b>Summative Index</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.44</b>

The results of the hierarchical regressions used to estimate the incremental and total variances associated with the variable groups are reported in Table 3. In addition final betas are reported for all individual variables of the media usage, dimensional elements of attitudes and beliefs toward advertising. Overall, the variables included in the analysis accounted for 42.4 percent of the total variance in students’ attitudes toward advertising in general.

**Step 1.** Three individual variables of the media usage (radio, internet, television) were entered as the first block of variables into the model. Media usage accounts for a very small amount of variance in attitude toward advertising. As Table 3 indicates, none of the media usage category is significant in terms of attitude toward advertising in general.

**Step 2.** Past literature (see Fishbein & Azjen, 1980) suggests that attitudes emanate from beliefs. In the light of this insight, belief statements were entered in the model as the first predictor regarding the dimensional elements of advertising before *instrument* and *institution*. With 17.8 percent additional variance beliefs are the second significantly influential factor ( $\beta$ =0.180,  $p$ <0.05) in determining people’s general attitude toward advertising.

**Step 3.** Attitude statements toward advertising as *institution* were entered subsequently. With additional 18.5 percent of the variance it has the strongest effect on how people think of advertising in general.



In other words, people's feelings about advertising as *institution* is the most powerful predictor of their general attitude toward advertising ( $\beta=0.372$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) among others.

**Step 4.** As the final block of variables attitude statements toward advertising as *instrument* were entered. It brought an additional 5.2 percent variance change. It is the third most effective predictor ( $\beta=0.262$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) in the model.

Overall, amount of students' media usage accompanied with dimensional elements of advertising explain 42.4 percent of the variance in students' general attitude toward advertising. However, individual contribution of media usage variables in total is minimal (less than 1%) compared to total variance. The biggest contribution to the model comes from advertising as *institution* dimension and beliefs (36.3%). In other words, people's perception of advertising is mediated more with their predetermined ideas of advertising and what they think of the function advertising serve.

**TABLE 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Media Usage and Three Dimensions of the Attitudes toward Advertising in General**

	Final Beta	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Media Usage</b>		
Radio	-0.062	
TV	-0.052	
Internet	0.038	
R <sup>2</sup> for media usage		0.009
<b>Beliefs toward advertising</b>		
	0.180*	
R <sup>2</sup> change for beliefs toward advertising		0.178
R <sup>2</sup> after step 2		0.187
<b>Advertising as institution</b>		
	0.372*	
R <sup>2</sup> change for advertising as institution		0.185
R <sup>2</sup> after step 3		0.372
<b>Advertising as instrument</b>		
	0.261*	
R <sup>2</sup> change for advertising as instrument		0.052
R <sup>2</sup> after step 4		0.424

\*p < 0,05

In order to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between students' media usage and their attitudes toward advertising in general, the mean scores of the heavy media users (respondents with highest media usage scores) vs. light media users (respondents with lowest media usage scores) were computed and

tested for significance in terms of their attitude toward advertising in general, their attitude toward advertising's individual dimensions and their beliefs about advertising using the T-test (Table 4).

**TABLE 4: Heavy vs. Light Users: The Effect of Media Usage on Attitudes Toward Advertising**

	Radio Mean		TV Mean		Internet Mean	
Attitude in general	Lowest 30% (n:79)	3.34	Lowest 20% (n:48)	3.25	Lowest 20% (n:53)	3.28
	Highest 30% (n:88)	3.35	Highest 20%(n:65)	3.35	Highest 20% (n:58)	3.45
Attitude towards advertising as institution	Lowest 30% (n:79)	3.67	Lowest 20% (n:48)	3.52	Lowest 20% (n:53)	3.80
	Highest 30% (n:88)	3.76	Highest 20%(n:65)	3.76	Highest 20% (n:58)	3.85
Attitude towards advertising as instrument	Lowest 30% (n:79)	2.60	Lowest 20% (n:48)	2.49*	Lowest 20% (n:53)	2.62
	Highest 30% (n:88)	2.69	Highest 20%(n:65)	2.80*	Highest 20% (n:58)	2.67
Belief	Lowest 30% (n:79)	3.00	Lowest 20% (n:48)	3.01	Lowest 20% (n:53)	3.06
	Highest 30% (n:88)	3.08	Highest 20%(n:65)	3.05	Highest 20% (n:58)	3.09

\* p<.05, T-test

The findings show that only television viewing creates a significant change in students' attitudes toward advertising as *instrument*. Other individual media channels do not create a significant change in any of the advertising dimensions and beliefs. The results support previous findings of hierarchical regression analysis where the media usage has a minimum contribution to attitudes toward advertising in general. The findings foreground that the change in the amount of media usage do not create a significant change in students' perception of advertising.

## CONCLUSION

University students represent a substantial marketing segment throughout the world. A recent market research revealed that there are 3 million university students in Turkey (Turkey Pocket Money Research, 2010). Beard (2003) explains the reasons for the growing business attention for this early adopter and trendsetter segment as follows;

- 1) They influence the purchasing decisions of their peers and parents,
- 2) They establish brand loyalties that last long after university,
- 3) They attain a higher standard of living after graduation.

Therefore, communicating to this market effectively and efficiently is very important for the advertising industry. Millions of dollars are spent each year in various outlets. At this point, to understand youth's media usage and their perception towards advertising is paramount for the advertisers and academia. This study attempts to fulfill this purpose.

The findings reveal that university students have a neutral perception of advertising in general. Congruent with the past literature, they have a more positive attitude toward advertising as *institution* than advertising as *instrument*. Their beliefs about advertising present a mix picture. They believe that advertising is essential but their assessment of its economic contribution to the lives of the individuals and its ethical standards involves negative orientations.

University students' media usage has a minimal effect on their attitudes toward advertising in general. Past research on Turkish students' media habits presented that television and internet are the most preferred media channels among youth in terms of leisure activities (Toruk, 2008: 486). A recent report by RATEM (2011) presented that the biggest increase in advertisement spending was in television. Hence, television does still have its dominance in terms of students' encounter with advertising practice. In parallel with this insight, the comparison of the mean ratings of heavy vs. light media users presents that only television viewing creates a significant change in students' attitudes toward advertising as *instrument*.

However, this study is intended as a preliminary research on the relationship between university students' media usage and their attitudes toward advertising in general. As with most similar research in this field, the use of a specific and convenience sample limits generalization of the results. Hence, in order to have a better understanding of the relationship in question to duplicate the research to a wider audience may provide useful. To include high school students and youngsters who are not enrolled to a school may present a different picture. In addition, most of the university students in Turkey are enrolled to state universities. To take state university students into account may contribute to the generalization of the findings.

Moreover, measurement instruments were adopted from a previous research. In this respect, despite pre-testing, there may have been some linguistic and cultural influences in the translation from English to Turkish. Finally, to assume simultaneous media usage effects and fusion measurements also are worth examining in terms of the media usage effects and perception of advertising.

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