

## I May Not Be Real, But I Have Impact

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I may not be real, but you may think that I am. I could be a static cartoon character or an animated character appearing in ads, in movies, or in television shows. I even might be viewed as a celebrity, of sorts. Whatever I am, I am often used in ads to promote a product or service. My intent is to get your attention and/or to persuade you to buy the product or service that I am representing. I might even be used to try to influence you in some other way (e.g., skull and crossbones image and Mr. Yuk®) to keep you away from something, like poisons. I could just be a common character symbol used in marketing; I could be owned by the company producing the product; or I could be moonlighting as a licensed character, used to promote products and services.

A recent study published in *Pediatrics*, a journal published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (see note below), found that children four to six years-old preferred graham crackers and gummy fruit snacks in terms of taste and choice in packages with a licensed character of interest to children more than the same product in the same package without a licensed character showing on the package. No significant taste preference was found for baby carrots, only snack choice preference.

**Focus:** Market segmentation, target marketing, advertising, sleeper effect (positive, negative, or neutral communicator; prestige effect; negative effect), AIDA model (attention, interest, desire, action), persuasion, and attitude change.

### Questions:

1. Define each of the terms listed above. Explain how each of these concepts relates to the situation under consideration.
2. Should marketers be allowed to use characters of the nature identified to influence the behaviour of children? Explain. At what age should such characters be allowed in ads? Explain. Are there situations when such characters should be allowed in ads? Explain.
3. What are some of the characters of the nature identified being when marketing to kids? How are they used (e.g., types of products/services, in advertisements, other uses)?
4. What are the laws in your country that relate to the use of such characters in advertising?

**Note.** Roberto, C. A., Baik, J., Harris, J. L., & Brownell, K. D. (2010). Influence of licensed characters on children's taste and snack preferences. *Pediatrics*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3433 - (see <http://www.pediatrics.org>)