

# Subliminal messages in children's cartoons and advertisements in English

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA ODGOJITELJSKI STUDIJ**

**Marta Mihoković**

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MOVIES AND ADVERTISING IN ENGLISH**

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**Mentor rada: doc. dr. sc. Alenka Mikulec**

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# Contents

<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>SAŽETAK</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1 <i>HISTORY OF SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES</i> .....	6
3.2 <i>SUBLIMINAL TECHNIQUES</i> .....	8
<b>4. SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES IN ANIMATED MOVIES</b> .....	<b>9</b>
4.1 <i>DISNEY ANIMATED MOVIES</i> .....	10
<b>5. SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING</b> .....	<b>15</b>
5.1 <i>EXAMPLES OF SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING</i> .....	16
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>7. REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>8. LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>IZJAVA O IZVORNOSTI ZAVRŠNOG RADA</b> .....	<b>26</b>

## **SUMMARY**

Nowadays, children spend a significant amount of time in front of different screens and they are subjected to the influence of the media and their manipulations. One example of such influence are subliminal or hidden messages which have been in use for a long time, but they often go unnoticed because they are below the level of detectable sensation. Some research over the past years shows that people can unconsciously store a subliminal message in their memory, thus enabling the creators of such messages to achieve the desired marketing or other outcomes. Scientists who deal with subliminal perception agree that the subject matter is intriguing and complicated. Namely, despite numerous studies that show that subliminal perception really has an impact on the audiences, many claim that this phenomenon does not exist. In addition, subliminal messages are considered to be on the border between ethical and unethical, legal and illegal and humane and inhumane, and many people wonder if they violate basic human rights. In this final thesis, several texts in English have been analyzed to find the information on subliminal messages, where they can be found and how they are used in animated movies and for advertising purposes, i.e. what impact they might have on children.

Key words: advertising, animated movies, hidden meaning, subliminal messages.

## SAŽETAK

U današnje vrijeme djeca provode značajan dio vremena ispred ekrana i podložna su utjecaju medija i njihovim manipulacijama. Jedan od primjera takvog utjecaja su subliminalne ili skrivene poruke koje su već dugo u upotrebi, ali često prolaze nezapaženo jer su ispod razine detektibilnog osjeta. Neka istraživanja proteklih godina pokazuju da ljudi mogu nesvjesno pohraniti subliminalnu poruku u svoje pamćenje, omogućujući tako kreatorima takvih poruka postizanje željenih marketinških ili drugih rezultata. Znanstvenici koji se bave subliminalnom percepcijom slažu se da je tema intrigantna i komplicirana. Naime, unatoč brojnim studijama koje pokazuju da subliminalna percepcija doista ima učinka, mnogi tvrde da taj fenomen ne postoji. Osim toga, smatra se da su subliminalne poruke na granici između etičkog i neetičkog, legalnog i ilegalnog te humanog i nehumanog, a mnogi se pitaju krše li one osnovna ljudska prava. U ovom završnom radu analizirano je nekoliko tekstova na engleskom jeziku kako bi se došlo do informacija o subliminalnim porukama, gdje se one mogu pronaći i kako se koriste u animiranim filmovima i u reklamne svrhe, odnosno kakav učinak mogu imati na djecu.

Ključne riječi: animirani filmovi, reklamiranje, skriveno značenje, subliminalne poruke.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term *subliminal message* refers to the use of hidden or masked stimuli to manipulate listeners or viewers to behave in ways they otherwise would not (Vokey & Read, 1985). Since most people are oblivious to the presence of subliminal messages in the media, they can be used to control people in masses via commercials, animated movies, music and other.

Human consciousness can receive only a small percentage of all the information that it is exposed to daily. According to Miliša and Nikolić (2013, p. 295), “a symbol is a name or an image that can be known in everyday life, but with its own meaning. That hidden meaning needs to be decoded”<sup>1</sup>. Otherwise, it remains undefined, unknown or hidden from us. Because of the hidden dimension of subliminal messages, it is necessary to know the roles of signs and symbols. That is the only way to protect ourselves from the manipulative content that is surrounding us (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013).

Subliminal perception fails to reach consciousness and it cannot be verbalized (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013). In other words, it stays in the subconscious part of the brain and even adults cannot recognize all verbal and non-verbal symbols in everyday life. This especially impacts young people and children because the younger a person is, the greater the possibility of influencing their behavior. Media pedagogy should therefore enable detection of subliminal stimuli so that young people can distinguish reality from fiction (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013). Many children spend countless hours in front of the screens every day, absorbing everything that is shown to them. Child’s brain at an early age always seeks new experiences, that is why what is delivered in cartoons gets toddlers glued to their chairs while watching animated series. A well-written scenario, the right audio and visual effects, as well as a descent looking character, are all the main factors for the child to become absorbed by the cartoon hero, and enough for his brain to begin automatically following his path and trying to be a copycat even for the finest details, including way of speaking, thinking, body language (Bjorkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1985 as cited in Habib & Soliman, 2015).

The main goal of this thesis is to analyze published texts in English about subliminal messages in animated movies and advertisements. In the first chapter subliminal perception will be explained in order to introduce us to the topic itself and so that we could understand how subliminal messages work. Next, the term subliminal message will be explained, its history and

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<sup>1</sup> The text originally written in Croatian has been translated by the author.

subliminal techniques that can be used in animated movies. The third and fourth chapters talk about subliminal messages that can be found in animated movies and advertisements, supported with examples.

## **2. SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION**

Harrel (1986 as cited in Foxall, et al. 2007) suggests that the term *perception* means the process of recognizing, organizing, selecting and interpreting stimuli in order to find meaning in the world around us. It includes signals which are the result of physical or chemical stimulation of the sensory system, and which go through the nervous system. The processes taking place during perception are very complex, but people can still perceive them effortlessly and with ease. Perception is an automatic process, for example, when a person sees a certain color, he or she can recognize it immediately, or when a person sees a word, he or she knows its meaning. Two individuals can be exposed to the same stimuli in the same environment, but how each of them will recognize, select, organize and interpret what they see is a completely individual process based on individual needs, values and expectations (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). The study of perception is part of the study of broad unconscious processes through which information from the external environment is monitored, transformed into beliefs, stored in memory, and acted upon by consumers (Foxall et al., 2007).

Subliminal perception is a form of communication related to persuasion communication whose messages are beyond the cognitive thresholds of the recipient's senses. It means that visual or audio effects are received without knowing the reference of the recipient, and their goal is to influence the preferences and behaviors (Kesić, 2003, p. 171). It is believed that these kinds of messages are successful because they influence people's thoughts without their knowledge.

We can take an animated movie as an example. Every child and every person experience the movie in their own unique way. The hidden contents shown in the movies do not reach consciousness immediately, and subliminal perception works in such a way that it remains unrecognized. For example, when viewers are presented with a visual scene, they consciously see all the details. If a small detail changes in the scene, the viewers process that change, but that does not mean that everyone has experienced it on the same conscious level. That change



can be processed on a conscious or subconscious basis depending on where the viewer's attention was focused (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013, p. 297).

### 3. SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES

The adjective “subliminal” consists of two parts: “sub” and “limes”. “Sub” means below, and “limes” indicates a limit, border. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *subliminal* means that something is not recognized or understood by the conscious mind, but it still has an influence on it. In other words, subliminal means that something is affecting a person’s mind even though they are not aware of it. It refers to anything that is below the level of detectable sensation.

In order to understand how subliminal messages work, first we need to know how the brain works.

The human brain is divided into two halves. The left half of the brain is responsible for the rational and analytical functions of the nervous system. In contrast, the right half is responsible for the subconscious work, emotions and instinct. Thus, the hidden message leaves no trace on the left half of the brain that does not recognize it, but in the right half, it becomes a command. (Borovac Zekan & Zekan, 2022, p. 104)

Everything that is subliminally stored in the brain will stay there forever and will under the right circumstances, cause some kind of reaction in a person. That does not mean that subliminal messages determine one’s reaction and actions. Subliminal messages only intensify and speed up the reaction in the person who is already under the influence of the subject of the message.

In general, we can distinguish between textual subliminal messages and graphical subliminal messages. Textual subliminal messages appear mostly in motion graphics (movies, animations ...) and the implementation method is usually done by implanting a text in only one frame in a frame sequence which does not last enough time for the text to be picked up by a viewer’s consciousness. These messages can appear in other environments as well – in these, the text is usually implanted in a background with a minute contrast between the text and its immediate surrounding (background) so that the viewer does not consciously detect the textual message. Graphical subliminal messages can appear in print, motion graphics (in which the implementation method can be the same as that of the textual subliminal messages) numerous cartoons, commercials and even in companies’ logos. (Varga & Gabrijelčić Tomc, 2016, p. 24)

### *3.1 HISTORY OF SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES*

According to the article written by Varga and Gabrijelčić Tomc (2016), the beginnings of researching subliminal perception date back to 1884, when the American researchers Pierce and Jastrow designed an experiment and found out that it is possible to distinguish minute difference in weight between two seemingly identical objects which look and feel the same. This experiment proved that subliminal perception truly exists. They discovered that people's choices among consciously equivalent options are not as random as was thought, but that they are influenced by factors one's subconsciousness can fathom even though the conscious mind might not be aware of them (Varga & Gabrijelčić Tomc, 2016).

In 1943 subliminal messages could occasionally appear on radio, in television programs and movies. The first reported advertisement dates to 1947 to a well-known animated movie "Daffy Duck" in which words "BUY BONDS" appeared briefly on the screen influencing people to buy war bonds (Stern, 2015).

With the beginning of secret experiments related to mind control, subliminal advertising also developed. Thus, on June 22, 1956, the BBC inserted subliminal shots into the television program. Those experiments were related to the threshold of consciousness, given that the messages were inserted at shorter and shorter intervals. It was at that time that a more concrete definition of the term "subliminal message" came into being (Martinović, 2014, p. 268).

Varga and Gabrijelčić Tomc (2016) mentioned that James Vicary was the first researcher who studied the effect of subliminal messages used in advertising and claimed to have increased the sales of Coca-Cola by 18.1% and popcorn by 57.8% after portraying subliminal messages during the viewing of a movie in a cinema in 1957. He argued that he did it by implanting into the movie a text that would appear every five seconds and last 1/2000th of a second so that viewers would not pick the text up consciously, but their subconscious would pick it up. The experiment was called "Invisible Commercials" and the texts were "Eat popcorn!" and "Drink Coca-Cola!". However, later on scientists failed to fully confirm the effect of subliminal messages on unconscious processing and Vicary admitted to faking his study.

Some researchers implied that those hidden messages were successful only in specific conditions. Following that, studies focused on analyzing those conditions. This was possible only with the development of cognitive and social psychology and on that basis, the researchers were competent to answer the questions, why there were so many contradictions (Varga &

Gabrijelčić Tomc, 2016, p. 24). Verwijmeren and colleagues proposed some methods that could contribute to the prediction of conditions necessary for both effective and non-effective subliminal advertising (Verwijmeren, Karremans, Stroebe, & Wigboldus, 2011 and Verwijmeren, Karremans, Bernritter, Stroebe, & Wigboldus, 2013 as cited in Varga & Gabrijelčić Tomc, 2016). It was later argued that goal relevance of the subliminal advertisement might be a necessary condition for subliminal advertising to work (Verwijmeren et al., 2011). In other words, if the people are motivated to pursue their goal, subliminal advertising might work. Karremans et al. (2006) demonstrated that subliminal priming of a brand of beverage increases choice for that beverage, but only when participants were thirsty. For the participants who were not thirsty, subliminal priming did not affect their choice (Verwijmeren et al., 2011, p. 1).

In their study, Verwijmeren et al. (2011) examined the role of consumption habits, and how they restrict the effectiveness of subliminal advertising, so as whether pre-existing habits can be overridden by a subliminal advertising of an alternative brand. They conducted the research on one hundred and forty-six students of the Radboud University Nijmegen. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Lipton Ice prime or the no prime condition and once the experiment started, the participants were asked to read the instructions and were seated behind a PC. The experiment started with the subliminal priming manipulation. Immediately after the priming task, product choice was measured. Subsequently, participants reported habitual consumption and level of thirst. At the end of the experiment, the participants were probed for prime awareness (Verwijmeren et al., 2011, p. 3). The results showed that subliminal priming of a brand positively affected choice for that brand to the extent that people were thirstier, but only when they had a relatively weak habit to drink Lipton Ice over Spa Rood. The participants who had a strong habit to drink Lipton Ice over Spa Rood chose Lipton Ice anyway (Verwijmeren et al., 2011, p. 5).

Imaging studies conducted between 2010 and 2015 have shown that our brain responds to subliminal messages in measurable ways. “Activity levels change in the amygdala, which processes emotions, the insula (involved in conscious awareness), the hippocampus (involved in processing memories) and the visual cortex” (Stern, 2015). Despite the contradictory knowledge related to subliminal messages and their effects, this subject is still interesting. In the next sub-chapter, some of the subliminal techniques that can be used will be mentioned.

### 3.2 SUBLIMINAL TECHNIQUES

Subliminal or similar techniques refers to any device or technique that is used to convey, or attempts to convey, a message to a person by means of images or sounds of a very brief nature that cannot be perceived at a normal level of awareness. (Klimov, 2003, p. 4)

Key (1992, as cited in Miliša & Nikolić, 2013) has presented five<sup>2</sup> basic audiovisual techniques by which subliminal information can be conveyed and which are often used in mass media:

1. Figure-Ground Reversals
2. Embedding
3. Tachistoscopic displays
4. Low-intensity lighting and low-volume sound
5. Lighting and background sound.

These five techniques are crucial to understanding media and how they work.

*Figure-Ground reversals:* "Visual and auditory perception can be divided into the figure – content, foreground, subject – and the background of the figure, that is, the environment in which the figure appears" (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013, p. 298). The figure and the background are unconsciously differentiated and separated. Conscious attention is focused on the figure, while the background (initially) remains unnoticed only to become the figure when a threatening or dangerous message is found in the background (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013).

*Embedding:* Embedding or inserting messages may initially indicate that provocative images have been covered up by the artist. When it comes to visual perception, "only 1/1000 of the total perceptions registered in the brain reflects on a conscious level. There is actually nothing hidden in the inserted images, but the observer suppresses this information, which then remains in the memory for a long time" (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013, p. 299).

*Tachistoscopic displays:* This is used with a cinema screen, flashing the words and images at high speed. Research has shown that flashes at speeds from 1/3000 seconds are the most effective and even though consciously noticed by only few people, they can be observed at the subliminal level (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013, p. 300).

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<sup>2</sup> Key (1992) presented six techniques, but since Miliša and Nikolić (2013) have presented only five in their article, those will be mentioned here as well.

*Low-intensity light and low-volume sound:* This technique involves using illumination at the levels that we cannot consciously perceive. Lighting in the video display is one of the stronger subliminal influences (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013).

*Lighting and background sound:* This is usually composed of several layers that are recorded separately and then mixed. When the background sound is created for a scene, the music can be integrated to achieve the dramatic effect or emotionally prepare the audience for any further developments of the event. The ultimate goal of using different techniques of lighting is the imposition of convincing illusions on the audience (Miliša & Nikolić, 2013).

#### **4. SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES IN ANIMATED MOVIES**

Television, as the most widespread media, has a strong influence in shaping the world we live in today.

Children are attracted to the cartoon content much more than the academic traditional ways of learning, due to the well written scenarios, audio and visual effects and colors. These factors are enough to cause the child to absorb information dozens better than that absorbed from a teacher in a classroom. (Jensen, 1998, p. 250)

A positive animated movie can be used to teach a child how to deal with certain situations, how to help others, how to control their temper, as well as to be aware of their surroundings and dangers. All these and much more are skills that could be incorporated into a cartoon and absorbed by the child's brain if delivered in the right and attractive way (Habib & Soliman, 2015).

On the other hand, there are cartoons filled with negative content that may confuse a child. It can lead a child to doubt his or her upbringing, skills, way of thinking and lifestyle. A character with a negative attitude and manners who appears on the screen as a hero could influence the child to change his or her understandings of their own life and surroundings, to sculpture one's acts in an aggressive and negative manner to situations they formerly acted positively due to their correct understanding before (Habib & Soliman, 2015). In order to reduce this, appropriate forms of media education should be developed. They should be available to children from early childhood and preschool age, but also in various forms of lifelong education. The task of parents, teachers and educators is to acquire the necessary media competences and to provide

children with the necessary support in the development of a personality that motivates the analytical thinking.

Several sources dealing with subliminal messages in animated movies have been analyzed and examples and conclusions found in them will be presented in the following section.

#### *4.1 DISNEY ANIMATED MOVIES*

Walter Elias Disney is one of the most powerful figures in the world of animated movie and his name is synonymous with the movie industry worldwide, mainly because of his production of cartoons and programs for children. These movies are generally considered harmless; however, this perception, coupled with a child's limited ability to discover hidden messages, makes it more effective as a tool for disseminating subliminal messages (Stewart, 2012). According to Klimov (2003), inappropriate sexual content has been found in some of Walt Disney's animated movies such as *Aladdin*, the popular children's story, *The Lion King*, the tale of *The Little Mermaid* and others.

##### EXAMPLE 1

###### *The Little Mermaid*

Klimov (2003) suggests that an example of a subliminal message can be found on a poster of the animated movie *The Little Mermaid* where one of the towers on the castle bears an unmistakable resemblance to a male reproductive organ (Figure 1). Many people were not happy about it and the Walt Disney Pictures company responded almost immediately saying it was purely an accident and because of the public protests, the tower was removed from the subsequent issues of the poster (Klimov, 2003).

**Figure 1.**  
*An example of a subliminal message on The Little Mermaid poster*



Note: Retrieved from <https://nceebiz.com/little-mermaid/little-mermaid-cover-dick/>

## EXAMPLE 2

*The Little Mermaid*

**Figure 2.**  
*An example of a subliminal message in the animated movie The Little Mermaid*



Note: Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/1458136/disney-cut-erection-little-mermaid/>



This example is also from the animated movie *The Little Mermaid*. In the early and mid-nineties, rumors spread about the image of the priest's erection during the scene from the wedding between Prince Eric and the sea witch Ursula. The priest is short, dressed in the clothes of a bishop and with a bulge in the groin area (Ostman, 1996). Because of the controversy regarding that detail, the scene was changed later on (Figure 2).

### EXAMPLE 3

#### *The Lion King*

The next example is from the animated movie *The Lion King*. The scene with a subliminal message appears in the 52<sup>nd</sup> minute of the movie and it shows Simba, Pumba and Timon lying on their backs and watching the stars. When Simba got up and fell tiredly on the edge of the cliff, his fall created a cloud of dust that wrote the word SEX in the sky (Figure 3). This subliminal message is also a great example of the technique called embedding mentioned earlier in this thesis. This subliminal message after initial rejections, was later acknowledged, but exclusively with the explanation that it was the promotion of the special effects studio "SFX" (Martinović, 2014, p. 315).

#### **Figure 3.**

*The clip from the animated movie The Lion King (left) and insertion of the word SEX (right)*



*Note: Retrieved from [https://m.baklol.com/baks/Funny/15-Disney-Subliminal-Messages--\\_209/Lion-King-Subliminal-Message---\\_2860](https://m.baklol.com/baks/Funny/15-Disney-Subliminal-Messages--_209/Lion-King-Subliminal-Message---_2860)*



#### EXAMPLE 4

##### *Tangled*

The word “SEX” also appears on the poster of the animated movie *Tangled* (Figure 4). In the scene, Rapunzel wraps her hair around Flynn Rider, and it spells the word “SEX” (Martinović, 2014).

**Figure 4.**

*An example of a subliminal message on the poster of Tangled*



*Note: Retrieved from*

<https://justagirlwithdisneyquestions.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/subliminal-messaging/>

#### EXAMPLE 5

##### *The Rescuers*

About 38 minutes into the animated movie *The Rescuers*, the two characters, Bianca and Bernard ride around the city in an empty sardine tin. Paying close attention, one can see a photographic image of a topless woman at the window of a building in the background in two different (non-consecutive) frames: first in the bottom left corner, then at the top center portion of the frame. Unless the movie is paused and carefully watched frame by frame, chances are it will go unnoticed. The most interesting thing about this case is that unlike the *Little Mermaid* and many others, The Walt Disney Pictures did not deny the hidden pictures of the naked woman, inserted in the *Rescuers*. Moreover, they admitted that they have been purposely

inserted into the cartoon in the postproduction process and not by the animators (Klimov, 2003, p. 16).

**Figure 5.**

*An example of a subliminal message in the animated movie The Rescuers*



*Note: Retrieved from <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/the-rescuers-topless/>*

However, the matter was still not settled. According to Ostman (1996), Disney company was aware of the rumors that were circulating about hidden messages in their animated films. Company's spokesman said that it was only a rumor that started at a radio station, and claimed that they would never put anything that could harm children on the cover. Regarding *The Lion King*, for example, the San Fernando Valley Folklore Society, who refuted the critics (and who are suspected to be a front organization for the Walt Disney Company) said that "a lot of imagination (and the power of suggestion) is required for anyone to see specific letters and words in the shapes formed by the swirling dust clouds, even when the video is played in slow motion" (Ostman, 1996, p. 85).

Therefore, considering such opposing claims, it is really difficult to claim with utmost certainty that these hidden messages were indeed intentional.

## 5. SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING

It has been proposed that by the age of sixty-six, most people will have seen two million television commercials. It is like watching television commercials for eight hours a day every day for six full years (Lindstrom, 2012, p. 43). As viewers, we used to be able to tell the difference between products that somehow played a role in a television show or movie, and the standard half-minute commercials. Today, those two types of advertising are difficult to distinguish.

Subliminal advertising, in other words disguised advertising, is a modern marketing instrument that is seeing an increase worldwide, as well as in Croatian business practice. Since its effects are on the borderline between the legal and illegal, the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom have pronounced subliminal advertising as illegal in 1958, and its application is also prohibited by the Croatian law (Muškinja & First Komen, 2013). Disguised advertising stands for a paid way of promoting a brand or some other characteristic of a product, service or manufacturer in the mass media with the intention that the user (viewer, listener or reader) does not perceive it as an advertising message. Its primary purpose is to increase brand awareness and to improve or strengthen the brand's image and name (Muškinja & First Komen, 2013). Media-illiterate readers cannot recognize the calculated nature of texts that contain hidden advertising, and that is why we are talking about media manipulation.

Lindstrom (2012) mentions the movie E.T. as an example of hidden advertising. The movie tells the story of an alien and Eliot, a lonely boy who had lost his father. When Eliot discovers the unusual creature, he tries to lure him out of hiding by leaving him chocolate sweets called Reese's Pieces. Reese's are made by the Hershey Corporation, which, thanks to this hidden advertising, tripled their sales and within a few months, more than eight hundred theaters across the US began offering these candies for the first time (Lindstrom, 2012). According to Lindstrom (2012), in order for disguised advertising to be successful, it must be subtle and refined rather than just throwing a product in front of the camera and expecting a reaction from the viewer. It also has to make sense if one wants a positive reaction.

For the purpose of attracting as many consumers as possible in the market competition, marketing experts advertise their products and services using a disguised influence on young people to try to attract them, for example, with easy-to-remember verses and intriguing images (Knezović & Maksimović, 2016).

As earlier mentioned, Verwijmeren et al. (2011) suggest that specific conditions must be met in order for subliminal advertising to be successful. For it to work, people have to be motivated for pursuing their goal. Although they confirmed their hypothesis, there is still a question of longevity of subliminal advertising effects.

Positioning, an organized system for finding a "window" in the mind of a potential customer, also plays a big role and it determines the tone and style of copywriting, provides premises for what messages will look like and what the message will say (Belak, 2008, p. 68). One method can be "gluing" one's product or service onto something that is already accepted as valuable, for example, using the phrase 'a Mercedes among copiers' (Belak, 2008, p. 70).

### 5.1 EXAMPLES OF SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING

Children live for candies, junk food and anything that is not very healthy. Therefore, brands have found a way to influence them by placing hidden messages in commercials, other advertisements, branding, animated movies and more. Consequently, 88% of advertised food in the children's program refers to food of poor nutritional value, such as candies, food sold by fast food chains and cakes. Not only do such products appear in cartoons but characters from these cartoons also appear on the packaging of children's food (Figure 6) (Oroz Štancl, 2014).

**Figure 6.**  
*Cartoon characters on children's food packaging*



Note: Retrieved from: <https://flanaxusa.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/study-cartoon-characters-attract-kids-to-junk-food/>

Partnership formation and the use of multiple media platforms to surround children with marketing are present among companies targeting children. One example of this strategy is the partnership between Lego, McDonald's, Sony and Warner Brothers in the promotion of a video



game and fast food chains by promoting the *Lego Batman* video game with toys that children receive in their Happy Meals at McDonald's (Figure 7) (Oroz Štancl, 2014).

**Figure 7.**  
*Lego Batman in McDonald's Happy Meal*



Note: Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/McDo.ph/photos/batman-is-coming-with-8-new-happy-meal-toys-for-you-to-collect-get-a-toy-from-th/1222290034486921/>

Besides using such marketing tricks to sell products, some advertisements also have subliminal messages in them. One such example is *Skittles*, multi-flavored candies produced by the Wrigley Company. On one of their products, "Skittles Berry Explosion", there was a subliminal message hiding on the package. Letter 's' was placed in front of the word *explosion* thus spelling the word "sexplosion" (Figure 8).

**Figure 8.**

*The subliminal message on the Skittles packaging.*



*Note: Retrieved from*

<https://olaknopek.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/subliminal-advertising/>

Later on, the company changed the packaging. Also, some of their commercials were banned because they were considered controversial. An illustration is *Skittles: Newlyweds*. The commercial shows two newlyweds having sex and when it is time for the groom to have an orgasm, he splashes his wife with skittles that symbolize the sperm (Figure 9).

**Figure 9.**

*A screenshot from the commercial Skittles: Newlyweds*

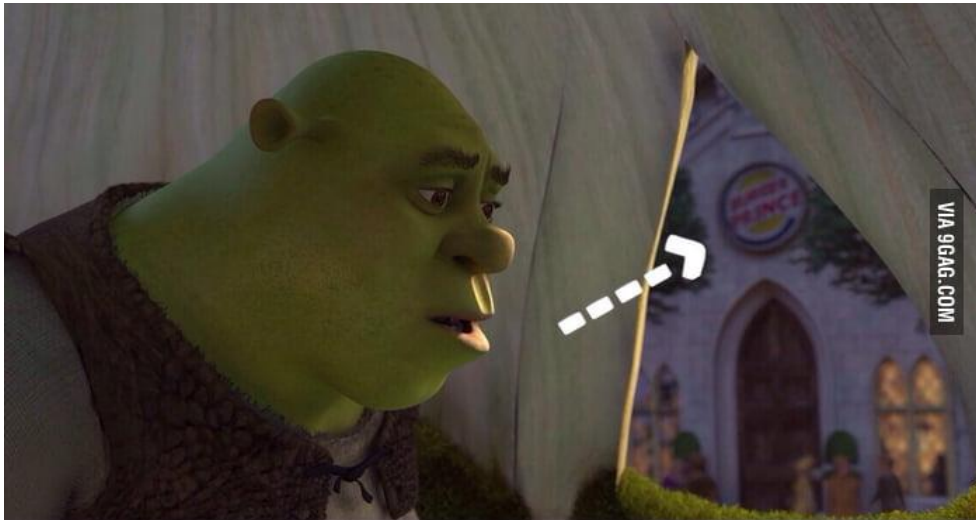


*Note: Retrieved from <https://joesdaily.com/video/skittles-newlyweds-nsfw/>*

In the movie *Shrek 2* there are several scenes where, if one looks closely, the logos of brands like “Burger King” (Figure 10), “Starbucks” (Figure 11), and more can be seen.

**Figure 10.**

*Logo of the “Burger King” in the background of a scene from Shrek 2*



*Note: Retrieved from <https://9gag.com/gag/aOmNNM3>*

**Figure 11.**

*Starbucks’ logo in the background scene of Shrek 2*



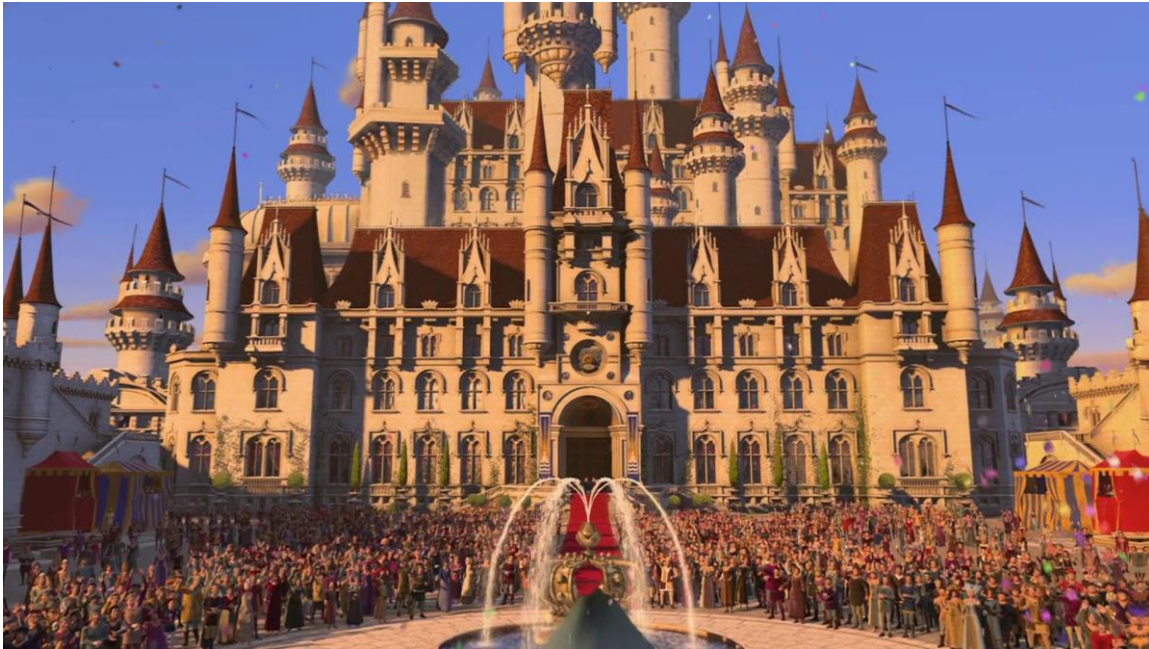
*Note: Retrieved from <https://9gag.com/gag/aOmNNM3>*

Next, an example of subliminal advertising can also be seen in the form of a fountain in the courtyard of the castle (Figure 12) that resembles the McDonald’s logo (Figure 13).



**Figure 12.**

*An example of subliminal advertising in Shrek 2 - McDonald's*



*Note: Retrieved from <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0298148/mediaviewer/rm3669612801/>*

**Figure 13.**

*McDonald's logo*



*Note: Retrieved from <https://seeklogo.com/vector-logo/301644/mcdonalds>*

This kind of advertisement is prevailing nowadays, and the number of consumers is constantly rising. People, and especially children, are being bombarded from every corner. This is why it is very important for adults to be aware of their children's viewing habits and to discuss them together.



## 6. CONCLUSION

Although they are forbidden, subliminal messages are all around us without us even realizing it. We are subjected to their influence every day while watching television, watching and listening to commercials, listening to music that is played in the store, by watching animated movies that we think are not at all harmful, and so on. Although we cannot avoid them, we can try to be more aware of them. Recent experiments (such as the one by Verwijmeren and colleagues) have shown that subliminal messages can only affect us if we are open to being persuaded by some special need, such as hunger or thirst. It is not completely clear whether subliminal messages are just accidents or media stunts trying to manipulate people in order to increase profits. True or not, it is important to acknowledge that they are present all around us. Some things are not what they seem to be, and often they are a matter of perspective and point of view.

The main objective of this thesis was to analyze texts in English and look at the manipulative role that mass media has in our and children's lives, primarily, how they shape young minds. Since we are under the influence of the rapid development of technology, and therefore mass media, it is inevitable for adults, but even more so for children, to fall under the influence of manipulation.

In order to at least minimize any form of manipulation by the media, appropriate forms of media education should be developed and made available to children from the early childhood and preschool age. Children need to be provided with the necessary support so that they may be able to develop critical and analytical thinking.

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## 8. LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 An example of a subliminal message on *The Little Mermaid* poster, Source: <https://nceebiz.com/little-mermaid/little-mermaid-cover-dick/>

Figure 2 An example of a subliminal message in the animated movie *The Little Mermaid*, Source: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/1458136/disney-cut-erection-little-mermaid/>

Figure 3 The clip from a movie *Lion King* (left) and insertion of the word SEX (right), Source: [https://m.baklol.com/baks/Funny/15-Disney-Subliminal-Messages--\\_209/Lion-King-Subliminal-Message---\\_2860](https://m.baklol.com/baks/Funny/15-Disney-Subliminal-Messages--_209/Lion-King-Subliminal-Message---_2860)

Figure 4 An example of a subliminal message on the poster of *Tangled*, Source: <https://justagirlwithdisneyquestions.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/subliminal-messaging/>

Figure 5 An example of a subliminal message in the animated movie *The Rescuers*, Source: <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/the-rescuers-topless/>

Figure 6 Cartoon characters on children's food packaging", Source: <https://flanaxusa.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/study-cartoon-characters-attract-kids-to-junk-food/>

Figure 7 Lego Batman in McDonald's Happy Meal, Source: <https://www.facebook.com/McDo.ph/photos/batman-is-coming-with-8-new-happy-meal-toys-for-you-to-collect-get-a-toy-from-th/1222290034486921/>

Figure 8 The subliminal message on the Skittles packaging, Source: <https://olaknopek.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/subliminal-advertising/>

Figure 9 A screenshot from the commercial Skittles: Newlyweds, Source: <https://joesdaily.com/video/skittles-newlyweds-nsfw/>

Figure 10 Logo of the "Burger King" in the background of a scene from *Shrek 2* , Source: <https://9gag.com/gag/aOmNNM3>

Figure 11 Starbucks logo in the background scene of *Shrek 2*, Source: <https://9gag.com/gag/aOmNNM3>

Figure 12 An example of subliminal advertising in *Shrek 2* - McDonald's, Source: <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0298148/mediaviewer/rm3669612801/>

Figure 13 McDonalds logo, Source: <https://seeklogo.com/vector-logo/301644/mcdonalds>

## **Izjava o izvornosti završnog rada**

Izjavljujem da je moj završni rad pod naslovom „Subliminal Messages in Children's Animated Movies and Advertising in English“ izvorni rezultat mojeg rada te da se u izradi istoga nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih koji su u njemu navedeni.