

UNBOXING MATERIALISM

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF YOUTUBE VIDEOS FROM POPULAR AMERICAN KIDFLUENCERS

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As an early adolescent, I discovered YouTube and family channels. Those memories were somehow abandoned from my mind, until I started my research on kidfluencers. I never realized I had myself looked up to kidfluencers at one point in my life. The topic of kidfluencers first came to me during a guest lecture in media ethics from Elisabeth Van den Abeele. I felt so inspired that I decided to dedicate my master thesis to this subject. After writing, I realized how much more there needs to be explored on this topic and how much I want to play a role in this. This dissertation was written to obtain a master's degree in communication management at the University of Ghent. Carrying out my first ever own research was a challenging, but enlightening experience. It has inspired me to develop myself further as a researcher. However, this experience had not been possible for without the help of some amazing people.

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Abstract

Kidfluencers inspire children around the world. Unsurprisingly, they are intensively engaged by advertisers to promote brands. However, kidfluencer content has been criticized for its endorsement of materialistic values. A notable gap exists within kidfluencer research on the relationship between exposure to such content and the development of materialistic values in children. Therefore, this study applied an exploratory content analysis of videos from six popular American kidfluencer YouTube channels ($N = 130$) to explore how materialistic values are represented and how these may differ across channels and genres. Results show that kidfluencer videos highly represent acquisition centrality, the first dimension of materialism, by implicitly communicating the importance of being able to buy a lot and placing high importance on acquisitions of toys. Additionally, with a median of three (often expensive) brands per video, brand presence was high. 35.4% of the videos were sponsored and contained some form of ad disclosure in almost all cases. These high brand presence and brand centrality might stimulate preferences for material goods over interpersonal relationships and activities within the child audience. Remarkably, educational videos were less sponsored and represented less materialistic values. It should be considered whether kidfluencers should follow the educational content route in the future to prevent higher levels of materialism in children, while at the same time playing a positive role in children's lives by teaching important knowledge, life lessons and skills. These initial findings show possibilities for further research on the topic of kidfluencers and materialism, or consumer socialization in general.

Keywords: Kidfluencers; Materialism; Content Analysis; YouTube; Consumer Socialization

Nederlandse samenvatting

Kidfluencers inspireren kinderen over de hele wereld en worden daarom ingezet door adverteerders om merken te promoten. Desondanks het succes ervan, wordt kidfluencer content bekritiseerd van materialistische waarden te verspreiden. Er is een belangrijk hiaat in de wetenschappelijke literatuur die deze mogelijke relatie tussen blootstelling aan kidfluencer content en materialisme in kinderen bestudeert. Deze studie dient als een basisonderzoek binnen dit domein. Aan de hand van een exploratieve inhoudsanalyse van videos van zes populaire kidfluencer YouTube-kanalen ($n = 130$), gaan we op zoek naar hoe materialistische dimensies gerepresenteerd worden en hoe en of deze verschillen tussen kidfluencer kanalen en genres. De resultaten tonen naan dat kidfluencers voornamelijk de eerste dimensie van materialisme, de centraliteit van aankopen, representeren door impliciet te communiceren dat het belangrijk is om veel spullen te kunnen kopen en veel belang te hechten aan de aankoop van speelgoed. Bovendien bedraagt de mediaan van het aantal (vaak dure) merken te zien in deze video's drie. 35.4% van de video's was gesponsord en bevatte in de meeste gevallen een reclamelabel. Deze hoge aanwezigheid van merken en centraliteit van merken kan ervoor zorgen dat kinderen materialistische zaken verkiezen boven interpersoonlijke relaties en activiteiten. Opmerkelijk vertoonden educatieve video's minder materialistische dimensies en waren ze zelden gesponsord. Daarom zouden kidfluencers kunnen overwegen deze educatieve weg in te slaan in de toekomst om hogere niveau's van materialisme in kinderen te verhelpen. Deze bevindingen vertonen mogelijkheden voor toekomstig onderzoek omtrent kidfluencers, of consumentensocializatie in het algemeen, om hierop verder te bouwen.

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Introduction

The past decade has seen intense changes in the entertainment and advertising industry targeting children (De Jans et al., 2019). Nowadays, much of the advertising to which children are exposed occurs online, including the exposure to sponsored content endorsed by social media influencers (De Veirman et al., 2019). Even young children under the age of thirteen have gained popularity and a significant following on their social media. These children are referred to as *kidfluencers*. They share engaging and entertaining content on their social media channels whereby they target other young children (Van den Abeele et al., 2023). Ryan, for example, is a popular child YouTube star with over 35 million subscribers to his channel *Ryan's world* on which he posts videos such as unboxings of toys (Boerman & Van Reijmersdal, 2020). Kidfluencer YouTube channels are increasingly dominating the list of top YouTube channel earners and viewer numbers (Feller & Burroughs, 2022).

Despite this success of kidfluencers in marketing and entertainment, they have become a central topic in the public debate in recent years, given their young audiences. Young children are susceptible to commercial exploitation and persuasion as they are incapable of critically processing advertising (De Jans et al., 2019). Accordingly, the numerous product endorsements in this kidfluencer content arise concerns regarding the endorsement of materialistic values. Materialism, defined as “the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states, including happiness” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 307), is a cause of worry in society. It is considered to be a socially undesirable character trait associated with negative outcomes on both the individual and the society (Roberts & Clement, 2007), such as lower levels of self-esteem (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Wright & Larsen, 1993), poorer relationships with parents, unhappiness (Belk, 1984), lower subjective well-being and depression (Kasser, 2005), as well as less engagement in other kinds of social behavior such as reading books, doing homework and household chores (Bottomley et al., 2010). Moreover, materialistic children are less generous, more likely to spend more money on themselves, and save less (Kasser, 2005).

Unsurprisingly, a stricter protection of kidfluencer audiences has been advocated, focusing on (1) the restriction of the commercial content that is integrated in kidfluencer content, (2) the increase of ad recognition through the use of ad disclosures or (3) the

improvement of young audiences' advertising literacy through training (Hudders & Lou, 2023). To proactively counter this critique and under the impulse of big management agencies as Pocket Watch, kidfluencer content has become more educational. It can be questioned however whether these new content genres in kidfluencer content are less materialistic or not.

Even though there has been a surge in academic interest in influencer marketing research in recent years, studies on the content of kidfluencers remain relatively limited to this day (Hudders et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this line of research by critically investigating materialistic representations within the content of kidfluencers, how those have evolved in recent years, whether there are differences regarding content genres, and if educational videos are less materialistic. More specifically, a content analysis of some of the most popular American kidfluencer YouTube videos was conducted.

This dissertation begins with a theoretical framework providing a context for this research. In the next chapter the method is explained in detail, with eye for future research. Then, results are broadly discussed. The dissertation ends with a conclusion and recommendations for future research, whilst acknowledging the limitations of this study. The results of this study should serve as a building block for future research on the kidfluencer phenomenon and consumer socialization in the digital era. The accumulation of scientific knowledge on this topic will provide regulatory organizations, governments, technology companies, and other relevant audiences, with insights in how to cope with this new and challenging marketing phenomenon.

Theoretical framework

1. Research context

1.1 Introduction to the kidfluencer phenomenon

Kidfluencers are children under the age of thirteen who gain popularity and a significant following by sharing engaging and entertaining content on their own or their parents' social media channels (Van den Abeele et al., 2023). Kidfluencer YouTube channels are increasingly dominating the list of top YouTube channel earners and viewer numbers (Feller & Burroughs, 2022). According to Social Blade (2020), a social media ranking website, three out of the top ten YouTubers with the most subscribers are child YouTubers: *Kids Diana show* with 120 million subscribers, *Like Nastya* with 113 million subscribers, and *Vlad and Niki* with 112 million subscribers. Since YouTube imposes an age restriction under thirteen years, their channels are typically overseen by their parents (Van den Abeele et al., 2023). Moreover, these parents help conceptualizing, creating, editing, and publishing content, facilitating business agreements, and overseeing interactions with followers (Castillo-Abdul, 2020; Tur-Viñes et al., 2018). The primary audience for kidfluencers encompasses preschool and primary school children (Hudders et al., in press). Because these kidfluencers show a striking similarity with their target audience (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020), children perceive kidfluencers as relatable peers with whom they might cultivate parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship is an illusion of an actual face-to-face relationship with a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Because of this close relation to their audience, brands have increasingly shown interest in making commercials with kidfluencers to achieve a more effective connection with children (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020). At merely six years old, kidfluencer Ryan started his YouTube channel *Ryan's Toys Review*, now known as *Ryan's World* (Craig & Cunningham, 2017), and became one of the highest-earning YouTubers by unboxing, demonstrating, and reviewing toys. Today, his channel has over 35 million subscribers, is associated with multiple (toy) brands and has diversified from just reviewing toys to pretend plays, science experiments, challenges, and more. This success of kidfluencer marketing can be attributed to the advantages that it has over more traditional forms of marketing. For example, kidfluencer content in which the paid advertisement takes form of the entertaining content, is considered *native advertising* (De Veirman et al., 2019). This embedded nature of

kidfluencer marketing lowers both children's ability and motivation to recognize the persuasive intention and critically reflect on it. As a result, the content is perceived by the child audience as highly credible. Therefore, advertisers are able to create a meaning transfer between the kidfluencer and their product. This high source credibility plays an important role in kidfluencer marketing. When kidfluencers are perceived as trustworthy, attractive and/or as an expert in their field, the advertisement is likely to result in a positive outcome.

In light of that success, kidfluencers are increasingly turning into global brands. For example, through his commercial deal with Pocket Watch, Ryan now has his own clothing and toys lines, a smartphone app, a video game, and his emporium only keeps growing (Feller & Burroughs, 2022). Pocket Watch is a digital studio managed by a group of former Nickelodeon and Disney executives responsible for delivering tween stars, such as Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez. Its goal is to transform young children from mere video viewers to neoliberal consumers of commercial products. After the success with Ryan, Pocket Watch has also partnered with *Kids Diana Show*, launching a toy line, clothing line, other lifestyle products, and a series with forty episodes. Besides Pocket Watch, other kidfluencer-management deals are undertaken with the goal of creating global brands. For example, managed by MC Yoola, *Like Nastya* has signed an exclusive global merchandising and licensing deal with commercial company IMG. In light of this over-commercialization and these global brand deals, we cannot help but be concerned with how this will impact the child audience.

1.2 Kidfluencer content

Through the years, the kidfluencer landscape has diversified into multiple content genres and YouTube has become the social network of choice for kidfluencers (Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2022). Multiple content analyses have brought insight into which genres encompass kidfluencer content. For example, an interpretative content analysis by Fernandez-Gomez et al. (2022) distinguishes five kidfluencer formats: scripted stories, challenges, games, vlogs and "others". To the latter category videos such as dances, and room tours, but also unboxing videos are assigned. However, these unboxing videos are often seen as a separate genre. Nicoll & Nansen (2018), for example, conducted a content analysis of one hundred toy unboxing videos, describing this genre as videos "in which children and adults record themselves unpacking and reviewing various commercial toys" (p. 1). In another content analysis, Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz (2016) distinguished the following video types:

unboxing videos, product reviews, tutorials, product collections, meet and greets, storytelling, storytelling and reviews, challenges, and TV appearances. Back in 2012, the most popular videos were product analyses, tutorials, and unboxings. However, in 2016, challenges became the dominant genre along those related to product analysis. In 2021 then, the most popular genres were scripted stories, challenges, and games (Fernandez & Gomez, 2021). Castillo-Abdul et al. (2020) limited the genres to five: outdoor activities, challenges, video tutorials, hauls, and storytelling. In light of the current study, we propose Table 1 as a categorization of kidfluencer genres based on this previous literature.

Table 1

Categorization of Kidfluencer Content Genres

Content genre	Explanation
Tutorial	Audiovisual productions that explain how to carry out a specific activity (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020).
Haul	Exposure of an object or product, in most cases, a toy, where its functionalities are explained (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020).
Vlog	Videos related to daily routines at home (Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2022).
Q&A session	Videos in which the kidfluencer answers questions posed by the audience.
Challenge	Videos related to the realization of a task proposed by him/herself or by the audience, or achievement in an activity that is often a game or video game (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020).
Unboxing	Videos in which children and adults record themselves unpacking and reviewing commercial toys (Nicoll & Nansen, 2018).
Product review	Videos in which a product is analyzed in detail, in this case the process of opening the product is not visible (Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz, 2016).
Role play	The protagonists act out a scripted story (Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2022).
Gameplay	Content revolving around playing a (digital) game (Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2022).

Other content analyses on kidfluencers are mostly restricted to the presence of (unhealthy) food and beverage references in the videos (e.g., Alruywaily et al., 2020; Fleming-Milici et al., 2023; Martinez-Pastor et al., 2021; Meyerding & Marpert, 2023).

1.3 The child audience: Consumer socialization

When working with a child audience, it is important to consider the consumer socialization process. Consumer socialization is defined as “the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketing place” (Ward, 1974, p. 2). It consists of three stages which overlap with the cognitive and social developments that occur during childhood development (John, 1999). Firstly, the *perceptual stage*, from age three to seven, is characterized by centration and unidimensional decisions. Children mainly focus on single dimensions of objects and events, such as the size of products, to inform their decisions. Children may exhibit familiarity with brands or retail stores, but do not understand them beyond a surface level. Moreover, children act egocentric in this stage, not considering other’s perspectives.

Secondly, in the *analytical stage*, from age seven to eleven, the development of children, cognitively and socially, results in a more sophisticated understanding of the marketplace, a more complex set of knowledge about advertising and brands, and the ability to consider perspectives other than their own feelings and motives (John, 1999). Children now seem to make more thoughtful choices. Additionally, they develop strategies to influence and negotiate for desired items, because of their new-found ability to consider the perspective of, for example, their parents.

Finally, in the *reflective stage*, from age eleven to sixteen, children show the most nuanced and complex decision-making processes because of further developments in information processing and social skills (John, 1999). Consumer decisions become more informed by social meanings because of a higher awareness of other’s perspectives, along with their need to shape their own identity and conform to group norms. Additionally, adolescents become more strategic in influencing parents and friends.

The consumer socialization process, as described by John (1999), has five outcomes or consumer competencies: *advertising and persuasion knowledge*, *transaction knowledge*, *decision-making skills and abilities*, *purchase influence and negotiation strategies*, and *consumption motives and values*. The latter refers to values resulting from consumer

socialization, such as materialism. Our culture encourages children to focus on material goods to achieve personal happiness, success, and self-fulfillment. As children become older, shifts in social development set the stage for the valuation of material goods in terms of personal fulfillment and social status. Exposure to media, advertising and entertainment, has long been considered important in influencing higher levels of materialism in children (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis & Moore, 1982).

Of course the environment which influences consumer socialization has changed much since the emergence of John's theory. The advertising and entertainment industry to which children are exposed has changed a lot in the past years (De Jans et al., 2019). This has also brought about the emergence of the kidfluencers, whose content shows a high integration of commercial and entertainment content. Therefore, we should question whether this process has changed throughout the years, and in turn, this theory should be reconsidered due to these advances in society. This study specifically focuses on how kidfluencers may contribute to materialism in children nowadays, thus one small aspect of the theory.

2. Research focus

2.1 Defining materialism

Belk was the first to define materialism as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (1984, p. 291). However, in 1992, Richins and Dawson expanded this definition with "the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states, including happiness" (p. 307), and thereby presenting materialism as a second-order construct comprising of three main dimensions: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possessions-defined success.

Acquisition centrality. Individuals with high levels of materialism place possessions and their acquisition at the center of their lives.

Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness. Materialistic individuals view possessions and their acquisition as essential to their satisfaction and well-being in life.

Possessions-defined success. Materialistic individuals tend to judge their own and others' success by the number and quality of possessions they possess.

Materialism is a cause of worry because it is considered a socially undesirable character trait associated with negative outcomes on both the individual and the society (Roberts & Clement, 2007). Several studies consistently confirmed a negative relationship between materialism and self-esteem, with higher levels of materialism strongly associated with lower levels of self-esteem (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Wright & Larsen, 1993). Moreover, materialism in children has been associated with unhappiness (Belk, 1984), lower subjective well-being and depression (Kasser, 2005), and with less engagement in other kinds of social behavior such as reading books, doing homework and household chores (Bottomley et al., 2010). Materialistic children are also less generous, more likely to spend more money on themselves, and save less (Kasser, 2005).

2.2 The development of materialism and the role of kidfluencers

In the early 2000s, under the influence of increasing levels of childhood materialism, researchers began exploring the mechanisms underlying the development of materialism (John & Chaplin, 2022). Firstly, researchers mainly focused on age (John & Chaplin, 2022). According to John's (1999) theory of cognitive development, children develop materialistic values in middle childhood, when they become aware of the social aspects of consumption and the symbolic meaning of brands. They begin associating material goods with social status, happiness and fulfilment and develop materialistic values to increase their personal worth, social status, or sense of belonging to a group (Chaplin & John, 2007; Valkenburg & Cantor, 2001). Additional research on age has been done by Chaplin and colleagues (Chaplin et al., 2014; Chaplin & John, 2007). They found that materialism developed in an inverted U-shaped curve. From the age of eight to nine, materialism increases, followed by a decrease from the ages of twelve to thirteen, and a further decline during the ages of sixteen to eighteen. In addition, they found an inverse relationship between materialism development and self-esteem in children. Between middle childhood and early adolescence, when materialism increases, self-esteem decreases. Then, between early and late adolescence, self-esteem increases, with materialistic values decreasing.

Besides age, interpersonal influences on materialism started to gain attention (John & Chaplin, 2022). Parents, for example, seem to have an important role in the development of materialistic values in their children. Parents who show high materialistic values, have children who are also highly materialistic (Chaplin & John, 2010; Goldberg et al., 2003; Rindfleisch et

al., 1997). However, peers are considered to play a crucial part in developing materialism as well, and much less research has paid attention to this (John & Chaplin, 2022).

Besides these mechanisms, research has consistently found a significant positive relationship between media exposure and materialism among children (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Chaplin & John, 2007; Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Moschis & Moore, 1982; Oprea et al., 2014; Vega & Roberts, 2011). Higher levels of materialism have been reported for adolescents who watch more television (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis & Moore, 1982). Goldberg and Gorn (1978) concluded in their experiment on four- to five-year-olds that exposure to a commercial increased the likelihood that they would prefer to play with the toy, instead of their peers. Few years later, Moschis and Moore (1982) found a correlation between television advertising viewing and materialism among twelve- to eighteen-year-olds. In 1993 then, Greenberg and Brand confirmed this positive relationship between exposure to television advertising and materialism through an experiment on fifteen- to sixteen-year-olds. These conclusions inspired another research by Oprea et al. (2014) twenty years later. Their longitudinal study proved that television advertising exposure has a positive causal effect on materialism among children in middle childhood. Thus, children who more frequently watch television, become more materialistic than those who do so less frequently. This kind of research is mainly grounded in *cultivation theory*, which suggests that media users adopt the ideologies presented in media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

However, nowadays, much of the entertainment and advertising to which children are exposed occurs online, including exposure to content from kidfluencers. Kidfluencers are both an important new source for entertainment for children, thereby replacing television, and an invaluable peer (De Veirman et al., 2019). The effects of exposure to their content, which is in part commercial, are assumed to induce even more materialism than television. Firstly, because children likely develop parasocial relationships with kidfluencers. A parasocial relationship is an illusion of an actual face-to-face relationship with a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These induce social learning processes, which means that children likely model the behavior of kidfluencers and as a result want products promoted by kidfluencers, making them, in turn, more materialistic. Secondly, results from a study from Rasmussen et al. (2022) indicate that children show a desire to become kidfluencers themselves. This process is referred to as *wishful identification* (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019), the psychological attachment between a viewer and a character which leads to imagining the self as being the character

(Cohen, 2018). The more a child wants to be like a kidfluencer, the more frequently they will purchase kidfluencer-promoted products (Rasmussen et al., 2022).

Actual research on the effects of kidfluencer content on materialism in children is still scarce (Tuominen et al., 2023). Regarding the question of whether kidfluencer content has the potential to increase materialistic levels in children, a first aim of this study is to explore how materialistic dimensions are represented in kidfluencer YouTube videos, how these have evolved in recent years, differ across kidfluencer content genres and educational videos.

RQ1. How are materialistic dimensions represented in kidfluencer YouTube videos, and how do these differ across genres, educational videos, and throughout recent years?

2.3 Brand presence in kidfluencer content

A study by Watkins et al. (2016) showed a positive relationship between advertising exposure and children's brand knowledge, which is in turn weakly associated with a preference for material objects over interpersonal relationships and activities. This suggests that when children are exposed to brands in kidfluencer content, they might develop brand knowledge, and in turn develop a preference for material objects. Previous content analyses have indicated that kidfluencer content contains high numbers of brand presence (Feijoo & Fernandez-Gomez, 2021; Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2022; Núñez-Cansado et al., 2021). According to a study of kidfluencer videos by Choi (2023), most of the brands in kidfluencer videos are presented in a way that is rather implicit, for example through product placement. In another interpretative content analysis of Spanish kidfluencers' content, Fernandez-Gomez et al. (2022) concluded that in 50% of the videos brand centrality was evident with an average of five brands per video. Moreover, kidfluencers showed significant brand sentiment (Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2021), indicating that kidfluencers express their opinion in an emotional way. Usually, the brands that are presented correspond to the toy sector (Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz, 2016).

In 2012, Smith et al. proposed a model for analyzing the presence of brands on YouTube channels. This model consists of the following seven items.

Promotional self-presentation. This refers to the actions which channels undertake to distinguish their content from other channels and to express a specific image and identity through relying on brands, objects, products, and symbols.

Brand centrality. This item examines whether brands play a central (brands are the focus) or a peripheral role (brands are supportive) in the videos.

Multiplicity of brands. This refers to the number of brands displayed or mentioned in the YouTube videos. In their exploratory study based on a content analysis of videos from the five most-viewed and most-subscribed YouTube channels starring Spanish children, Tur-Viñes et al. (2018) concluded that brands are omnipresent in kidfluencer videos.

Marketer-directed communication. This item refers to the extent to which consumers communicate with the advertised brand. YouTube is a less convenient platform for consumers to communicate with brands, compared to Twitter and Facebook (Smith et al., 2012). Moreover, Tur-Viñes et al. (2018) conclude that kidfluencer YouTube videos do not include this type of communication. Therefore, we do not consider this item in the current study.

Response to online marketer action. This variable determines whether videos are a response to a specific marketer action, such as posing questions. Kidfluencer can, for example, comments on videos by brands. However, the study by Tur-Viñes et al. (2018) concluded that this does not happen often. Therefore, we chose not to include this in analysis.

Factual information about the brand. This item assesses whether factual information is shared about the brand in the video, such as pricing, location, quality, etc.

Brand sentiment. This final item considers what kind of sentiment (positive, neutral, unclear, or negative) the kidfluencer conveys towards brands in the videos.

Based on this model, the second aim of this study is to analyze brand presence in kidfluencer YouTube videos, how this has changed throughout recent years, to what extent there are differences between content genres, and how this differs within educational kidfluencer YouTube videos.

RQ2. To what extent are brands present in kidfluencer YouTube videos, and how does this differ across genres, educational videos, and throughout recent years?

Method

To address the above research questions, a deductive, qualitative, and quantitative content analysis was applied. Through a close reading of a relevant amount of videos, valuable insights can be obtained into materialistic patterns of kidfluencer YouTube videos.

3. Sample

To determine which channels would be included in the sample, popular YouTube kidfluencers were identified by means of SocialBlade (<https://socialblade.com/>), a social media analytics service that has previously been used by other researchers (Alruwaily et al., 2020; Fleming-Milici et al., 2023; Meyerding & Marpert, 2023; Tur-Viñes et al., 2018). From the list 'Made-for-kids', four channels (*Like Nastya*, *Kids Diana Show*, *Vlad and Niki*, *Ryan's World*) were identified that correspond to the following criteria: (a) the main character is a child who appears in all videos on the channel, (b) the location was listed as US, (c) all video titles and dialogue were in English, (d) the content consists of non-animated videos, and (e) the main audience consists of children. Additionally, based on a snowball method on YouTube, *Everleigh*, *The Fishfam* and *McClure Twins* were included in the sample. The final sample thus included the following seven kidfluencer channels:

Like Nastya. Anastasia Sergeyevna Radzinskaya, ten years old, is a Russian-American YouTuber. Her parents launched her channel in 2016. Her content includes children's songs, educational entertainment, unboxing videos, vlogs, and roleplays.

Kids Diana Show. Eva Diana Kidisyuk, also ten years old, is a Ukrainian-American YouTuber. Her channel was launched in 2015. Her content includes children's songs, unboxing videos, vlogs, educational entertainment, and roleplays.

Vlad and Niki. *Vlad and Niki* is a YouTube channel featuring Russian-American siblings Vladislav Vashketov (11), Nikita Vashketov, (8), Christian Sergey Vashketov (4) and Alice Vashketova (1). Vladislav and Nikita started their YouTube channel in 2018. Their content mainly exists of vlogs and roleplays.

Ryan's World. Formerly known as *Ryan's Toys Review*, *Ryan's World* features Ryan Kaji, twelve years old. He began making unboxing videos in 2015. Since then, his channel has diversified in multiple content genres.

Everleigh. Everleigh Rose Smith-Soutas, eleven years old, started her own channel in 2016, after becoming famous on her collaborative channel *ForEverAndForAva* with her best friend. Her content mainly exists of vlogs, lifestyle videos, challenges, and unboxings. Her parents own a separate YouTube-channel on which they share family content.

The Fishfam. *The Fishfam* is a family YouTube-channel portraying the lives of Oakley (7), Taytum (7), Halston (4), Oliver (3), and Cohen Fisher (1). The account is managed by their mother, Madison Fisher (32), and father, Kyler Fisher (36). Their channel launched in 2016 and mainly consists of vlogs, lifestyle videos, and challenges.

McClure Twins. The McClure twins, Ava and Alexis (10) launched their YouTube channel in 2017, after becoming popular on Instagram by being child fashionistas. Their channel mainly consists of challenges and lifestyle videos.

We sampled following descriptive information from each of the seven channels: (1) the number of videos the channel posted on YouTube, (2) the number of views generated across all videos posted on YouTube, and (3) the number of subscribers to each channel (see table 2).

Table 2

Summary Data for the 7 Kidfluencers' YouTube Channels Based on Publicly Available Data on Their Channels

Statistics for Like Nastya as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	869
Number of views across all videos	98.172.150.297
Number of subscribers	113 mln.
Statistics for Kids Diana Show as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	1.166
Number of views across all videos	100.773.147.341
Number of subscribers	120 mln.
Statistics for Vlad and Niki as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	668
Number of views across all videos	86.456.314.969
Number of subscribers	112 mln.

Statistics for Ryan's World as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	2.678
Number of views across all videos	56.973.748.729
Number of subscribers	36,5 mln.
Statistics for Everleigh as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	149
Number of views across all videos	758.831.084
Number of subscribers	3,96 mln.
Statistics for The Fishfam as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	960
Number of views across all videos	1.305.660.224
Number of subscribers	4,53 mln.
Statistics for the McClure Twins as of March, 2024	Frequency
Number of videos	586
Number of views across all videos	844.943.361
Number of subscribers	1,89 mln.

Videos from 2019 until 2024 were theoretically sampled from the channels by looking at the titles, and collected in a YouTube playlist until theoretical saturation was reached. After watching few videos from *The Fishfam*, it was decided to exclude them from analysis. Even though Taytum and Oakley can be considered kidfluencers, the content of the channel does not seem targeted at children in comparison with the other analyzed channels, but rather at young adolescents. The final sample included 130 videos. Table 3 provides an overview of the number of videos per kidfluencer channel, per genre, and per year. In total, 16.2% ($N = 22$) of the analyzed videos had an educational purpose.

Table 3*Overview of Analyzed Videos per Kidfluencer Channel, Genre, and Year*

Channel	Frequency	Percentage	Genre	Frequency	Percentage	Year	Frequency	Percentage
Like Nastya	17	13,1%	Tutorial	6	4,6%	2019	11	8,5%
Kids Diana Show	24	18,5%	Haul	9	6,9%	2020	25	19,2%
Vlad and Niki	25	19,2%	Vlog	15	11,5%	2021	31	23,8%
Ryan's World	25	19,2%	Q&A	0	0%	2022	23	17,7%
Everleigh	20	15,4%	Challenge	20	15,4%	2023	34	26,6%
McClure Twins	19	14,6%	Unboxing	11	8,5%	2024	4	3,1%
			Product Review	0	0%			
			Role play	43	33,1%			
			Gameplay	12	9,2%			
			Other	14	10,8%			

4. Ethics

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it utilized publicly available videos on the platform YouTube. Screenshots were taken from these videos and then sketched out for the reporting of the results so that the kidfluencer from whom the video originated remained unclear. In addition, we did not have copyright to include the screenshots themselves.

5. Coding

5.1 Codebook development

The codebook ([see appendix 2](#)) was developed based on the research questions and the related studies mentioned in the theoretical framework.

The first part of the codebook is meant for item identification. Each video was assigned a *video code* (Var1), a number ranging from one to *N*. Additionally, the *codification date* (Var2) and *coder name* (Var3) are provided.

The second part of the codebook contains descriptive data, including *kidfluencer* name (Var4), *video date* (Var5), *video title* (Var6), *number of views* (Var7), *number of likes* (Var8), *number of dislikes* (Var9), and *number of comments* (Var10). Additionally, the variable *storyline* (Var11) was included for which the coder summarized the plot of the video. The variable *content genre* (Var12) includes nine categories of content genres: tutorial, haul, vlog, Q&A, challenge, unboxing, product review, role play, and gameplay (see table 1). Additionally, we included the category 'other' for videos that could not be classified under any of the above categories, such as a 'get ready with me'-video. Finally, the coder had to indicate whether the video had a clear *educational purpose* (Var13).

The third part of the codebook contains variables for answering the first research question. Therefore, three variables were developed, based on the three dimensions of materialism: *acquisition centrality* (Var14), *acquisition as the pursuit of happiness* (Var15), and *possessions-defined success* (Var16). Based on the Material Values Scale for children (MVS-c; [See appendix 1](#); Oprea et al., 2011), we included different indicators for the three dimensions and adapted them to the context of kidfluencer videos. For acquisition centrality, these indicators are: 'Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive things?', 'Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to have a lot of money?', 'Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive clothes?', 'Does the

kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive brands?', 'Does the kidfluencer disclose it is important to be able to buy a lot of things?', and 'Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to get a lot of presents?'. These variables are categorical and contain two answer categories: 'yes' and 'no'. Additionally, for each 'yes', the coder was asked whether the disclosure was explicit (e.g., through words) or implicit (e.g., through emotions or actions). For acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, the indicators are: 'Does the kidfluencer act happy when getting expensive things?', 'Does the kidfluencer act happy when getting more things?' and 'Does the kidfluencer act unhappy if they do not get the things they want?'. Finally, for possessions-defined success the indicators are: 'Does the kidfluencer associate owning expensive things with being successful?', 'Does the kidfluencer associate owning new things with success?', and 'Does the kidfluencer associate having a lot of things with success?'. In addition to the three dimensions of materialism, one more question was posed relating to materialism (Var17): 'In general, does the video attach more importance to friendship or non-materialistic things versus materialistic acquisitions?'

With the final part of the codebook, we aim to answer the second research question on brand presence. Based on the model of Smith et al. (2012) brand presence was divided into four categories: *brand centrality* (Var18), *multiplicity of brands* (Var19), *factual information* (Var20), and *brand sentiment* (Var21). Brand centrality refers to the extent to which brands are central to the video. It was measured as a dichotomous variable: either brands did not have a protagonist role in the video, or they did. Multiplicity of brands refers to the number of brands present in the video and was measured as a categorical variable, including '0', when no brands were present, numbers from one to ten, and a category for more than ten brands. Brands were counted when either the name or the logo was present or mentioned in the video. Factual information refers to the extent to which the kidfluencer discloses factual information about the brands present in the video. It was measured as a dichotomous variable: 'no factual information is provided' or 'factual information is provided'. Finally, brand sentiment refers to the emotions the kidfluencer explicitly shows when interacting with a brand or a product. It was also measured as a dichotomous variable: 'the kidfluencer does not express explicit emotions when interacting with brands or products in the video' or 'the kidfluencer does express explicit emotions when interacting with brands or products in the video'. These variables were inspired by the research of Fernando-Gomez et al. (2021) and Tur-Viñes et al. (2018).

Finally, a section for comments was included in the codebook to provide additional information about certain video fragments which could serve as examples.

5.2 Intracoder reliability

In order to validate the codebook, an intracoder variability test was conducted. On March 3rd, 2024, fourteen videos, two from each kidfluencer channel, were analyzed. Answers for only the multiple-choice questions were collected in an Excel-file. Twenty-two days later, on March 25th, those same videos were analyzed and data was collected in that same Excel-file. Then, for each variable intracoder variability was tested with the ReCal-tool developed by Dr. Deen Freelon (<https://dfreelon.org/>). ReCal (Reliability Calculator) is an online utility that computes intercoder reliability coefficients for nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio data judged by two or more coders. Krippendorff's Alpha was selected as the reliability coefficient. An overview of all Krippendorff's Alpha's for the variables can be found in [Appendix 3](#). For all variables, except Var14.2.2 and Var19, perfect scores were found ($\alpha = 1$), which means that there were no variances between the first and second analysis. For Var14.2.2, one answer varied between first and second analysis, which resulted in a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.727. For Var19, one answer was different in the second analysis, which resulted in an alpha of 0.981. The alpha for Var19 is higher because it is classified as ordinal as opposed to nominal for Var14.2.2. Overall, it can be concluded that the codebook was a reliable instrument for this study.

5.3 Coding procedure

After intracoder reliability testing, the codebook was imported in Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/>) to facilitate data collection. After each video, the coder provided a new entry in Qualtrics. In addition, while watching the videos, a Word-document was utilized to note certain details and screenshots were taken from the videos.

6. Analysis

All videos were analyzed during a period ranging from March 28th, 2024, until April 8th. Data was analyzed by means of SPSS version 28 and Excel. Descriptive statistics were used, such as frequency analyses and crosstabs. Additionally, the findings in the notebook were analyzed to enrich the results.

Results

7. RQ1: Representation of materialistic dimensions

RQ1: How are materialistic dimensions represented in kidfluencer YouTube videos, and how do these differ across genres, educational videos, and throughout recent years?

To answer this question, we explored how and to what extent the three dimensions of materialism according to Richins and Dawson (1992) are represented in kidfluencer videos. We first discuss the general focus on materialistic acquisitions in the videos. In every section we elaborate on the differences between genres, kidfluencers, educational videos, and throughout the years.

7.1 General focus on materialistic acquisitions (Var17)

In general, 43.8% ($N = 57$) of the videos were centered around materialistic acquisitions. These videos paid a significant amount of attention towards possessing or obtaining materialistic objects, such as toys, electronics, clothing or makeup. Videos that did not center around materialistic values included quizzes about sports teams, spelling bee challenges, and other challenges, such as staying in the pool for 24 hours. Table 4 provides an overview of the frequencies and percentages in which videos from certain channels, genres and years were centered around materialistic acquisitions. In terms of kidfluencers, *Everleigh's* videos centered the most around materialistic acquisitions, followed closely by *Rayn's World* and *Vlad and Niki*. In terms of genres, hauls and unboxings were always centered around materialistic acquisitions, because that is the purpose of the video. For example, in a haul, one of the kidfluencers showed all their fidget toys. The focus of the video was thus on how much and which fidget toys they possessed. In terms of years, videos from 2019 and 2021 were the most centered around materialistic acquisitions.

Table 4

Overview of Frequencies of Videos centered around Materialistic Acquisitions per Kidfluencer, Genre, and Year

Kidfluencer	Frequency	%	Genre	Frequency	%	Year	Frequency	%
Like Nastya	3	17.65%	Tutorial	0	0.00%	2019	6	54.55%
Kids Diana Show	6	25.00%	Haul	9	100.00%	2020	11	44.00%
Vlad and Niki	13	52.00%	Vlog	3	20.00%	2021	15	48.39%
Ryan's World	14	56.00%	Q&A	0	0.00%	2022	10	43.48%
Everleigh	16	80.00%	Challenge	7	35.00%	2023	12	34.29%
McClure Twins	5	26.32%	Unboxing	11	100.00%	2024	1	25.00%
			Product Review	0	0.00%			
			Role play	14	32.56%			
			Gameplay	7	58.33%			
			Other	6	42.86%			

3.51% ($N = 2$) of the videos centered around materialistic acquisitions were categorized as educational. Videos were labeled as educational when their purpose was clearly to teach children an important lesson, such as the importance of brushing your teeth, the colors, animals, the alphabet, or numbers. An example of such an educational video, which did not center around materialistic acquisitions, is one in which the mother explains why floods happen (see figure 1). Her explanation is very clear and seems relatively easily understandable for children. It includes a pop quiz to test whether the viewer has understood how floods happen. Upon watching these educational videos, we noticed that these sometimes included spelling mistakes or other grammatical mistakes, most often in the videos from the Russian American kidfluencers: *Like Nastya*, *Vlad and Niki* and *Kids Diana Show*. For example, in a video the mother meant to spell “lunch box”, but instead spelled it like “launch box”.

Figure 1

Example of an Educational Video



One of the two videos that were classified as educational while being centered around materialistic acquisitions was a video in which the kidfluencer explicitly expressed they wanted to obtain new and expensive items, such as a Porsche car (materialistic acquisition). Therefore, the kidfluencer learned how to earn pocket money by completing household tasks (educational purpose), an important process in consumer socialization. The second video

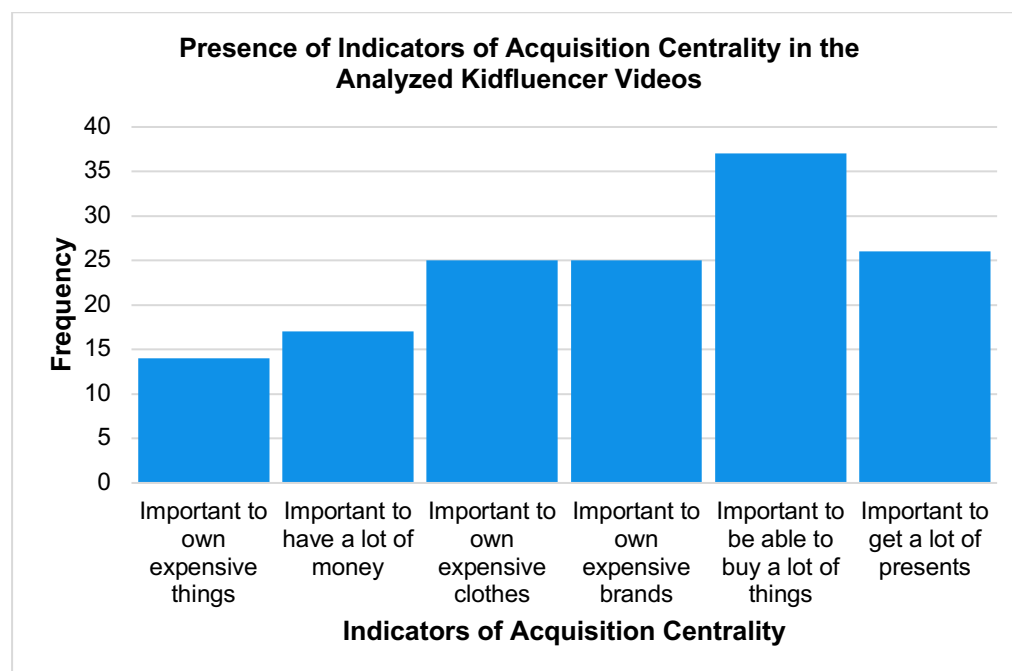
which centered around materialistic acquisitions whilst having an educational purpose was a video in which the kidfluencer learned about the importance of and how to recycle (educational purpose) while being sponsored by Paw Patrol and playing with the new toy set (materialistic acquisition).

7.2 Acquisition centrality (Var14)

Acquisition centrality is the first of the three materialistic dimensions. Figure 2 provides an overview of to what extent which indicators of acquisition centrality were represented in *all* analyzed videos¹.

Figure 2

Overview of Indicators of Acquisition Centrality in the Analyzed Videos



¹ Videos could represent multiple indicators in one video.

In 10.8% of the videos ($N = 14$), the kidfluencer indicated implicitly that it is important to own expensive *things*. For example, in one video the kidfluencer insisted on getting an iPad, which is an expensive product. They stated that they needed it to play games and watch entertainment, thereby implicitly communicating that it is important to own a tablet. Moreover, in 19.2% of the videos ($N = 25$), the children wear expensive *clothes*, thereby implicitly communicating that owning expensive clothes is important. Kidfluencers, for example, wore T-shirts from Gucci or shoes from Nike Jordan. Additionally, in 19.2% of the videos ($N = 25$), the kidfluencer implicitly communicated a high importance of owning expensive *brands* by, for example, showing Porsche cars. In few cases, the kidfluencer expressed the importance of owning expensive brands in an explicit manner, through words. In a “Get Ready With Me”-video, for example, one kidfluencer stated the following about a perfume from the Ariana Grande collection.

“This smells so good. You can get it at Ulta Beauty. I think you can get it at TJ Maxx too. And it smells so good. It is literally to die for. It is so good. I cannot even describe how good it is.”

With these words, the kidfluencer is clearly providing a call to action to buy this product. See figure 3 for a sketch of how the product was presented in that video.

Figure 3

Example of Product Placement in a Video



In 13.1% of the videos ($N = 17$), the kidfluencer implicitly communicated the importance of having a lot of money. For example, most kidfluencers had videos about their birthday parties. On the one hand, we noticed that in most of these videos getting presents was not emphasized. Rather, special attention goes to activities, games and performances or just being together with family. On the other hand, the parties that are being thrown and filmed always seem to be very excessive, for example by inviting performers, organizing games that require lots of material, providing lots of food, having tons of decorations especially made for the party, etc. Thereby, they implicitly communicate that having a lot of money to throw parties like these is important.

In 28.5% of the videos ($N = 37$), the kidfluencer implicitly disclosed it is important to be able to buy a lot of things. For example, in a commercial video for Hot Wheels, kidfluencers obtained a large amount of toy cars and racing tracks. Thereby creating the idea that you need all this to be able to play.

Finally, in 20.0% of the videos ($N = 26$), kidfluencers implicitly emphasized the importance of getting a lot of presents. For example, in one of the analyzed videos, the kidfluencer got presents after completing a challenge. Instead of it being just one present, she obtained a large amount of toys. Figure 4 provides a sketch of the scene.

Figure 4

Example of a Kidfluencer getting a lot of Presents after completing a Challenge



Then we investigated the differences between kidfluencers, genres, educational content, and throughout the years. Table 5, 6, 7 and 8 provide an overview of the frequency of presence of the indicators for acquisition centrality (Var14.1, Var14.2, Var14.3, Var14.4, Var14.5, Var14.6) per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. Table 9 provides an overview of the total number of representations of acquisition centrality per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. In general, *Vlad and Niki* communicated the first dimension of materialism the most, followed by *Everleigh*, mostly by implicitly communicating the importance of owning expensive brands (Var14.4) and the importance of being able to buy a lot of things (Var14.5). The *McClure Twins* represented acquisition centrality the least. Looking into the genres, role plays and vlogs represented the most indicators for acquisition centrality, mostly through implicitly communicating the importance of owning expensive clothes (Var14.3). When looking at the difference between educational and non-educational videos, we see that educational videos contained less representation of acquisition centrality than non-educational videos. Finally, looking at the differences between the years the videos were posted, we can see that the videos from 2021 represented acquisition centrality the most, through implicitly communicating the importance of being able to buy a lot of things (Var14.5).

Table 5

Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var14 per Kidfluencer

Kidfluencer	Var14.1	Var14.2	Var14.3	Var14.4	Var14.5	Var14.6
Like Nastya	0	1	5	0	1	3
Kids Diana Show	0	2	13	0	2	4
Vlad and Niki	5	9	5	14	14	8
Ryan's Worlds	1	1	1	1	9	4
Everleigh	8	3	0	9	8	6
McClure Twins	0	1	1	1	3	1

Table 6*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var14 per Genre*

Genre	Var14.1	Var14.2	Var14.3	Var14.4	Var14.5	Var14.6
Tutorial	0	0	0	0	1	0
Haul	2	2	1	2	6	4
Vlog	3	5	7	4	5	6
Q&A	0	0	0	0	0	0
Challenge	3	2	0	5	4	5
Unboxing	1	0	1	0	7	3
Product Review	0	0	0	0	0	0
Role play	3	3	10	6	8	2
Gameplay	0	4	3	5	5	5
Other	2	1	3	2	1	1

Table 7*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var14 per Educational Purpose*

Educational Purpose	Var14.1	Var14.2	Var14.3	Var14.4	Var14.5	Var14.6
Educational	1	1	9	1	1	0
Non-Educational	13	16	16	24	36	26

Table 8*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var14 per Year*

Year	Var14.1	Var14.2	Var14.3	Var14.4	Var14.5	Var14.6
2019	2	3	3	4	3	4
2020	3	2	2	6	7	5
2021	3	5	5	5	12	8
2022	4	1	3	6	7	2
2023	2	5	11	3	7	5
2024	0	1	1	0	0	1

Table 9

Overview of Frequency in Representation of Acquisition Centrality across Kidfluencers, Genres, Educational Content, and Years

Kidfluencer	Frequency	Genre	Frequency	Educational Purpose	Frequency	Year	Frequency
Like Nastya	10	Tutorial	1	Educational	13	2019	19
Kids Diana Show	21	Haul	17	Non-educational	131	2020	25
Vlad and Niki	55	Vlog	30			2021	38
Ryan's World	17	Q&A	0			2022	23
Everleigh	34	Challenge	19			2023	33
McClure Twins	7	Unboxing	12			2024	3
		Product Review	0				
		Role play	32				
		Gameplay	22				
		Other	10				

7.3 Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness (Var15)

Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness is the second dimension of materialism. Figure 5 provides an overview of to what extent which indicators of acquisition centrality were represented in *all* analyzed videos². In 12.3% ($N = 16$) of the analyzed videos, the kidfluencers acted happy when getting expensive things. In 23.8% ($N = 31$) of the videos, the kidfluencers acted happy when getting more things. In 7.7% ($N = 10$) of the videos, the kidfluencers acted unhappy when not getting the stuff they wanted.

Figure 5

Overview of Indicators of Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness in the Analyzed Videos

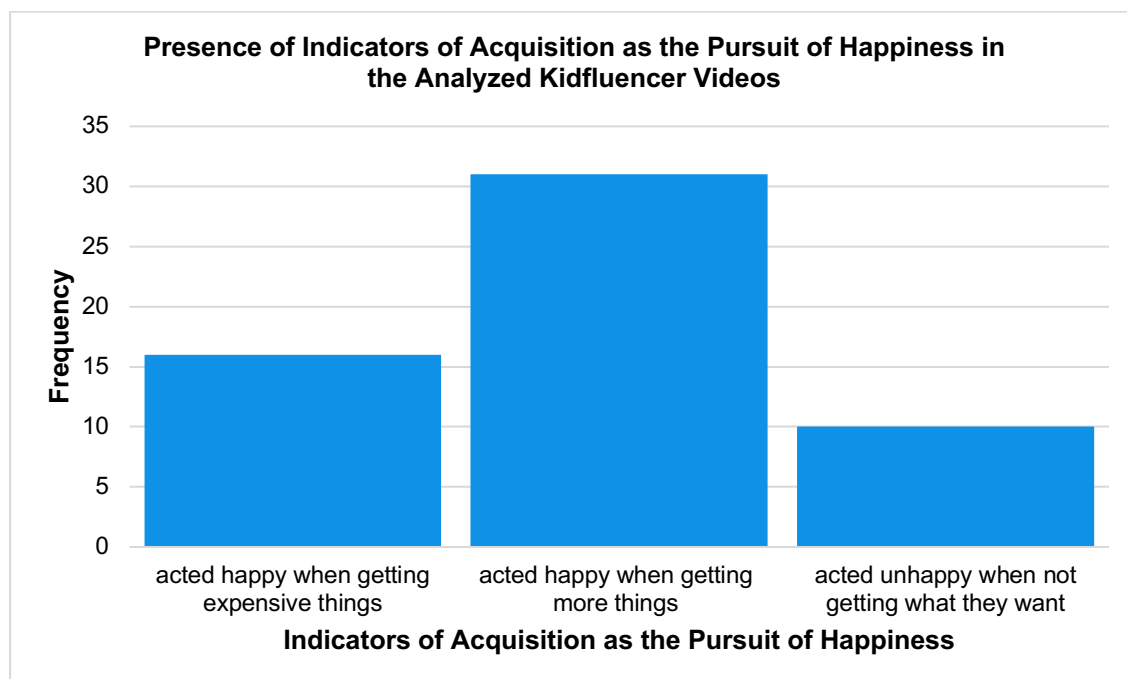


Table 10, 11, 12, and 13 provide an overview of the frequency of presence of the indicators for acquisition as the pursuit of happiness (Var15.1, Var15.2, Var15.3) per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. Table 14 provides an overview of the total number of representations of acquisition as the pursuit of happiness per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. Similar to the first dimension, *Vlad and Niki* communicated this second dimension of materialism the most, followed by *Everleigh*, mostly through acting happy when getting more things (Var15.2). Again, the *McClure Twins* represented acquisition centrality the least. In term of genres, challenges, role plays and gameplays represented the most indicators

² Videos could include multiple indicators in one video.

for acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, mostly through the kidfluencer acting happy when getting more things (Var15.2). Educational videos contained less representation of this dimension than non-educational videos. Videos from 2021 represented acquisition as the pursuit of happiness the most through the kidfluencer acting happy when getting more things (Var15.2).

Table 10

Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var15 per Kidfluencer

Kidfluencer	Var15.1	Var15.2	Var15.3
Like Nastya	1	3	1
Kids Diana Show	0	6	1
Vlad and Niki	8	12	4
Ryan's World	2	4	0
Everleigh	4	5	3
McClure Twins	1	1	1

Table 11

Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var15 per Genre

Genre	Var15.1	Var15.2	Var15.3
Tutorial	0	0	0
Haul	2	5	0
Vlog	3	4	0
Q&A	0	0	0
Challenge	3	6	3
Unboxing	1	3	1
Product Review	0	0	0
Role play	2	6	4
Gameplay	5	6	1
Other	0	1	1

Table 12*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var15 per Educational Purpose*

Educational Purpose	Var15.1	Var15.2	Var15.3
Educational	0	0	1
Non-educational	16	31	9

Table 13*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var15 per Year*

Year	Var15.1	Var15.2	Var15.3
2019	3	5	3
2020	1	5	2
2021	6	12	1
2022	3	4	2
2023	2	4	2
2024	0	1	0

Table 14

Overview of Frequency in Representation of Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness across Kidfluencers, Genres, Educational Content, and Years

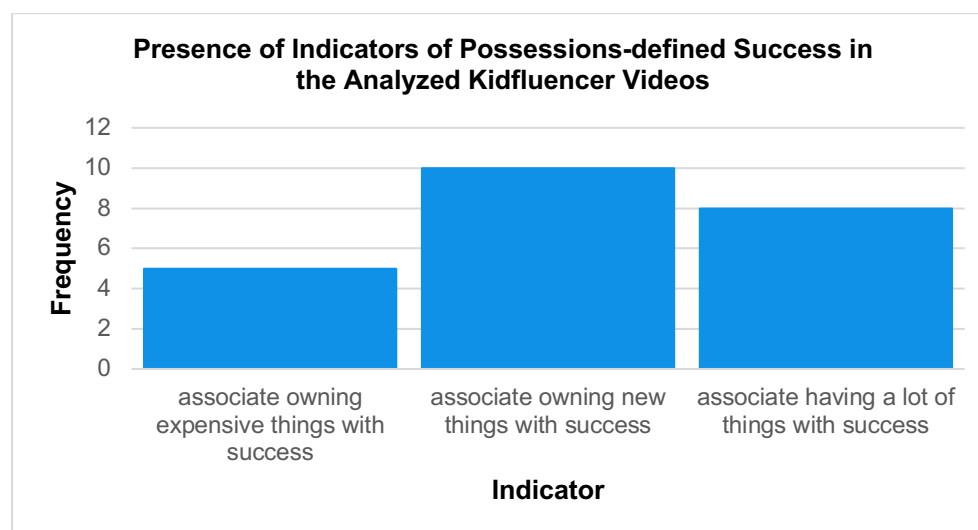
Kidfluencer	Frequency	Genre	Frequency	Educational Purpose	Frequency	Year	Frequency
Like Nastya	5	Tutorial	0	Educational	1	2019	11
Kids Diana Show	7	Haul	7	Non-educational	56	2020	8
Vlad and Niki	24	Vlog	7			2021	19
Ryan's World	6	Q&A	0			2022	9
Everleigh	12	Challenge	12			2023	8
McClure Twins	3	Unboxing	5			2024	1
		Product Review	0				
		Role play	12				
		Gameplay	12				
		Other	2				

7.4 Possessions-defined success (Var16)

Possessions-defined success is the final dimension of materialism. Figure 6 provides an overview of which indicators of this dimension were represented in the videos³. In 3.8% ($N = 5$) of the videos the kidfluencers associated owning *expensive things* with being successful. In 7.7% ($N = 10$) of the videos the kidfluencers associated owning *new things* with being successful. In 6.2% ($N = 8$) of the videos the kidfluencers associated owning *a lot of things* with being successful. In most cases, kidfluencers associated owning new things, a lot of things, or expensive things with success, because they were associated with winning a certain challenge for the video. In other videos this idea was represented by suggesting that you need certain products to be considered part of a social group, which refers to social success. For example, in one video the father said: “All these girls today have Hydroflasks”. Hydroflasks are a type of water bottle that is rather expensive. In 2021, the bottle became popular on TikTok and YouTube because of the VSCO-girl trend. VSCO-girls are girls who look and behave a certain way and can be considered popular. They wear clothes from certain brands, such as slippers from Birkenstock, make their own bracelets, ride longboards, etc. To be a VSCO-girl you had to own a Hydroflask. By saying this, the father thus contributes to the notion of having to own certain expensive brands or products to fit in and be considered socially successful.

Figure 6

Overview of Indicators of Possessions-defined Success in the Analyzed Videos



³ Videos could include multiple indicators in one video.

Table 15, 16, 17, and 18 provide an overview of the frequency of presence of the indicators for possessions-defined success (Var16.1, Var16.2, Var16.3) per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. Table 19 provides an overview of the total number of representations of possessions-defined success per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year. *Everleigh* represented this dimension the most through associating owning expensive things (Var16.1) and new things (Var16.2) with success, closely followed by *Kids Diana Show* and *Vlad and Niki*. *Ryan's World* and *McClure Twins* represented it the least. In terms of genres, challenges, unboxings, role plays and gameplays represented the most indicators for possessions-defined success, mostly through associating new things with success (Var16.2). Educational videos contained less representation of this dimension than non-educational videos. In terms of years, videos from 2019 represented the most indicators of possessions defined success, through associating new things (Var16.2) and a lot of things (Var16.3) with success.

Table 15

Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var16 per Kidfluencer

Kidfluencer	Var16.1	Var16.2	Var16.3
Like Nastya	0	1	0
Kids Diana Show	0	4	3
Vlad and Niki	2	2	3
Ryan's World	0	0	0
Everleigh	3	3	2
McClure Twins	0	0	0

Table 16*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var16 per Genre*

Genre	Var16.1	Var16.2	Var16.3
Tutorial	0	0	0
Haul	0	1	1
Vlog	0	0	0
Q&A	0	0	0
Challenge	3	2	2
Unboxing	0	3	2
Product Review	0	0	0
Role play	1	2	2
Gameplay	1	2	2
Other	0	0	0

Table 17*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var16 per Educational Purpose*

Educational Purpose	Var16.1	Var16.2	Var16.3
Educational	0	1	0
Non-educational	5	9	8

Table 18*Frequency of Presence of Indicators of Var16 per Year*

Year	Var16.1	Var16.2	Var16.3
2019	3	5	5
2020	0	1	0
2021	0	2	1
2022	1	1	1
2023	1	1	1
2024	0	0	0

Table 19

Overview of Frequency in Representation of Possessions-defined Success across Kidfluencers, Genres, Educational Content, and Years

Kidfluencer	Frequency	Genre	Frequency	Educational Purpose	Frequency	Year	Frequency
Like Nastya	1	Tutorial	0	Educational	1	2019	14
Kids Diana Show	7	Haul	2	Non-educational	22	2020	1
Vlad and Niki	7	Vlog	0			2021	6
Ryan's World	0	Q&A	0			2022	3
Everleigh	8	Challenge	7			2023	3
McClure Twins	0	Unboxing	5			2024	0
		Product Review	0				
		Role play	5				
		Gameplay	5				
		Other	0				

8. RQ2: Brand presence

RQ2: To what extent are brands present in kidfluencer YouTube videos, and how does this differ across genres, educational videos, and throughout recent years?

8.1 Multiplicity of brands (Var19)

The median for the number of brands present in all videos was 3 brands per video. See table 20 for an overview of the median per kidfluencer, genre, educational purpose, and year.

Table 20*Overview of Median Number of Brands per Video per Kidfluencer, Genre, Educational Purpose, and Year*

Kidfluencer	Median	Genre	Median	Educational Purpose	Median	Year	Median
Like Nastya	3	Tutorial	2	Educational	3	2019	6
Kids Diana Show	4	Haul	2	Non-educational	2.5	2020	2
Vlad and Niki	2	Vlog	5			2021	2
Ryan's World	3	Q&A	0			2022	3
Everleigh	5	Challenge	3			2023	3
McClure Twins	2	Unboxing	4			2024	3
		Product Review	0				
		Role play	2				
		Gameplay	2				
		Other	4.5				

8.2 Brand centrality (Var18)

In general, 35.4% ($N = 46$) of the analyzed videos were centered around one brand, that brand being the sponsor of the video. The most common brands were toy brands, such as Mattel and Paw Patrol. Mostly these videos did contain an ad disclosure (see for example figure 7). However, some did not include an ad disclosure. For example, in a video a birthday party was organized for which they used products from the brand AfroUnicorn (see figure 8). A significant amount of factual information about this brand was provided and the products were shown often, however the video was not officially sponsored by the brand, or rather, this was not clear because of the lack of an ad disclosure.

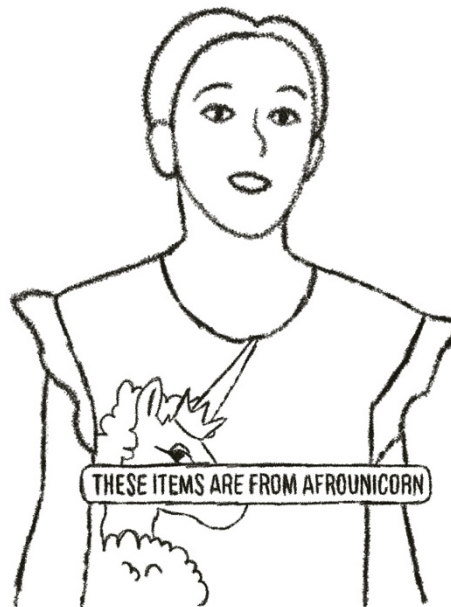
Figure 7

Example of an Ad Disclosure



Figure 8

Example of a Video without an Ad Disclosure while promoting a Brand



Some kidfluencers also promoted their own brand in their videos. On the one hand, we noticed that kidfluencers included an ad disclosure when the video showed products from their own brand. On the other hand, kidfluencers also wore their own merchandise in some of the videos. In those cases, there is never an ad disclosure involved, even though they are promoting their own branded T-shirts. Additionally, we noticed that in some of the sponsored videos, other brands were blurred out or covered up, see for example figure 9 in which the brand Nutella is covered up. In one video the Starbucks name was transformed into “Starducks” and the logo was made into a duck instead of the mermaid (see figure 10). In contrast, another unsponsored video centered around creating new Starbucks drinks, showed the logo and the name very explicit multiple times (see figure 11). Some kidfluencers thus put more effort into concealing brands to prevent unintended brand promotion, while others did not.

Figure 9

Example of Brand Cover-up



Figure 10

Example of Brand Transformation

STARDUCKS



Figure 11

Example of Clear Brand Presence



Looking at the difference in brand centrality between kidfluencers, we see that for both *Vlad and Niki* and *Ryan's World* 52.0% ($N = 13$) of their videos were dedicated to one brand. Brand centrality was evident in 29.2% ($N = 7$) of the analyzed videos from *Kids Diana Show*, 26.3% ($N = 5$) of the videos from the *McClure Twins*, and 23.5% ($N = 4$) of the videos from *Like Nastya*. Brand centrality was the lowest for videos from *Everleigh* with 20.0% ($N = 4$), who did have the highest median for the number of brands present in her videos.

Looking at the differences between genres, role plays ($N = 17$) were the most popular genre for sponsored videos, followed by unboxing videos ($N = 11$), gameplays ($N = 7$), and vlogs ($N = 5$). Hauls and challenges ($N = 3$) were the least popular genres for promotion of one brand. In two cases, an educational video was sponsored by a brand. 41.9% ($N = 13$) of the videos from 2021 were dedicated to one brand, followed by 36.4% ($N = 4$) of the videos from 2019. In 32.4% ($N = 11$) of the videos from 2023, and 32.0% ($N = 8$) of the videos from 2020, brand centrality was evident. 30.4% ($N = 7$) of the videos from 2022 were sponsored. For videos from the year 2024 brand centrality was evident in 25.0% ($N = 1$).

8.3 Factual information (Var20)

In 89.1% ($N = 41$) of the sponsored videos, the kidfluencers or their parents provided factual information about the products. They explained where the product could be found, how it worked, or that it comes in different variations in case of surprise toys.

8.4 Brand sentiment (Var21)

In 89,1% ($N = 41$) of the sponsored videos, the kidfluencers expressed emotions when interacting with the product. Usually, they acted excited or showed high engagement with the gifted toys by playing with them (see figure 12).

Figure 12

Example of high Excitement when interacting with a Brand



Discussion

9. Conclusion

This study explored how materialism is represented in kidfluencer YouTube videos by critically and systematically investigating the content. In general, 43.8% of the videos within the sample were centered around the acquisition of material goods, mostly toys. Especially hauls and unboxing videos tend to focus on the acquisition of material goods, since it is the main purpose behind these genres. Since nearly half of the videos were thus centered around the acquisition of material goods, the necessity of investigating the relationship between kidfluencers and materialism is clear.

The first objective was to discover how and to what extent the materialistic dimensions according to Richins and Dawson (1992) are represented in kidfluencer YouTube videos, and how this differs across kidfluencer channels, genres, and years. Acquisition centrality was the most represented. This can be attributed to the fact that this dimension had more indicators than the other two, resulting in higher chances of representation. Within this dimension kidfluencers mostly implicitly communicated that it is important to be able to buy a lot of things. In terms of kidfluencers, *Vlad and Niki* and *Everleigh* represented this dimension the most through implicitly communicating the importance of owning expensive brands. This was done so by product placement of expensive brands, such as Porsche cars and Ariana Grande perfumes. The *McClure Twins* represented this dimension the least. This can be attributed to the type of videos they produce, since these are mainly challenges which do not center around the acquisition of material goods. In terms of genres, role plays and vlogs mainly implicitly communicated that it is important to own expensive clothes. Role plays were the most common analyzed genre, which can explain their high representation for this dimension. Vlogs, on the other hand, were the least represented in the sample and still highly represented acquisition centrality. This could mean that kidfluencer vlogs are inherently more materialistic than other genres. In these vlogs, kidfluencers often wear clothes from brands such as Gucci. The presence of these expensive (clothing) brands in these videos could stimulate needs or wants within the child audience. Firstly, children might look up to these kidfluencers and dream of becoming one themselves (Rasmussen et al., 2022). Therefore, they will try to emulate these kidfluencers and want to buy the same products as them. Secondly, children might develop parasocial relationships with these kidfluencers, which makes kidfluencers

invaluable peers who can influence consumer decisions of children. Through showing children these expensive brands and showing these large amounts of toys, kidfluencers may even stimulate overconsumption. The second most present dimension was acquisition as the pursuit of happiness. This dimension was most represented through kidfluencers acting happy when getting more things. In terms of kidfluencers, *Vlad and Niki* and *Everleigh* again contained most representations of this dimension through acting happy when getting more things. In terms of genres, challenges, role plays and gameplays often showed kidfluencers acting happy when getting more things. Finally, possessions-defined success was the least represented dimension of materialism. We argue that this might be because parents, who play a critical role in the kidfluencer video production (Castillo-Abdul, 2020; Tur-Viñes et al., 2018; Van den Abeele et al., 2023), know how unethical it would be to associate owning a certain brand or product with success. Associating getting new things with success was the most present indicator of possessions-defined success. In terms of kidfluencers, *Everleigh* most often implicitly associated owning expensive and new things with success. In terms of genres, challenges, unboxings, role plays, and gameplays sometimes included an association between owning new things and success.

The second objective of this study was to investigate to what extent brands are present in kidfluencer videos and how this differs across channels, genres, and years. The median of number of brands visible or mentioned per video was three. This is important because high brand exposure in kidfluencer content contributes to brand knowledge and a preference for material goods over interpersonal relationships and activities (Watkins et al., 2016). *Everleigh's* videos contained the most brands, and in terms of genres, vlogs contained the most brands. 35.4% of the videos were sponsored by most often a toy brand, such as Mattel. In most cases these videos included an ad disclosure. This is important because recognizing the commercial intent behind a video is necessary for activating advertising literacy. However, ad disclosures alone might not be effective in activating advertising literacy (Hoek et al., 2020). In terms of kidfluencers, *Vlad and Niki* and *Ryan's World* had the most sponsored videos. Role plays were the most popular genre for promoting a brand. In 89.1% of the sponsored videos, the kidfluencer provided factual information about the brand and showed emotions of excitement when interacting with it. Remarkably, in some sponsored videos, other brands were blurred out. Even in some rare cases in which the video was not sponsored, brands were transformed or covered up. We question why not all kidfluencers practice these disguising

techniques of non-sponsoring brands in their videos. This would significantly decrease children's exposure to brands and might in turn result in lower materialistic values.

Additionally, we found clear differences between educational and non-educational videos from kidfluencers. Non-educational videos contained less representation of all dimensions of materialism, were less centered around material acquisitions, contained less brands, and were rarely sponsored. This is important because educational videos should be concerned with educating children. Their primary goal should not be commercial. Some of the videos included education on consumer socialization competencies. For example, learning how to earn money by doing household tasks in order to buy more toys, or showing certain shopping skills, and online shopping skills.

As a final remark, upon watching these videos, we noted how much toys and material goods were needed just for production of these videos. That makes us wonder whether this in and on itself should be considered materialistic, because we ask ourselves how these products are utilized after production of the video.

To conclude, kidfluencers do implicitly communicate materialistic values, mainly by placing a high importance on acquisitions of toys and through the product placement or sponsorship of expensive brands. This might stimulate a preference for material goods over interpersonal relationships and activities within children. It should be considered whether kidfluencers should follow the educational content route in the future to prevent higher levels of materialism in children.

10. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Firstly, since the sampling method was theoretical, the sample was not completely representative, and the results cannot be generalized. Additionally, we could not make conclusions about differences throughout the years because of this. Moreover, based on this study, we cannot establish correlations between kidfluencer content and materialistic levels in children. Therefore, we strongly suggest future research looks into the relationship between exposure to kidfluencer content and materialistic levels in children. An Ecological Momentary Assessment approach might serve as a qualified research method for this. Experiments with the goal of providing evidence for causation are recommended as well.

Secondly, this study encountered strategies kidfluencers apply to limit brand exposure, such as blurring and transforming brand logos and names. Future research could establish a

classification of these techniques by means of a content analysis and investigate which of these strategies is most effective or appreciated within the audience.

Thirdly, we suggest future research investigates the production process of kidfluencer videos in light of sustainability and overconsumption, since we found that a lot of material goods are required.

Finally, this and previous studies have mainly focused on the negative side of kidfluencers. Therefore, it might be insightful to investigate whether kidfluencer content has beneficial aspects as well for children. The consumer socialization process has undergone changes in this digital era, and therefore kidfluencers may play a crucial role herein. In addition, kidfluencers provide content which is aimed at educating children. So, it might be interesting to investigate whether these educational videos are effective in reaching their intended goals.

11. Practical recommendations

We think that it is important for kidfluencers, and their parents or managers, to be aware of how their content can affect the development of materialistic values in children. They should explore new types of content which do not represent materialistic dimensions as much. Therefore, they should look at the content from the *McClure Twins*. Their channel consists mostly of challenges which have nothing to do with materialistic acquisitions. Another option is to consider creating more educational videos which do not center around materialistic acquisitions. We recognize that stepping away from materialistic acquisitions might be challenging, since sponsorships are an important revenue for kidfluencers. Nevertheless, we strongly feel that the ultimate goal of kidfluencer content should be entertaining and not commercial. To limit brand exposure, kidfluencers could apply strategies such as blurring and transforming names or logos from brands to minimize brand exposure in their videos. It will also stay extremely important to provide ad disclosures when the content is sponsored. These disclosures contribute to consumer socialization by learning to recognize commercial intentions. Additionally, when videos are not sponsored, but information about a certain product or brand is provided, kidfluencers could explicitly mention that the video is not sponsored by this brand. This could also contribute to ad recognition.

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Appendix

1. Material Values Scale for children (adapted from Oprea et al., 2011)

Material centrality	
MVSc-01	Do you think it's important to own expensive things?
MVSc-02	Do you think it's important to own a lot of money?
MVSc-03	Do you think it's important to own expensive clothes?
MVSc-04	Do you think it's important to own expensive brands?
MVSc-05	Do you think it's important to be able to buy a lot of things?
MVSc-06	DO you think it's important to get a lot of presents for your birthday?
Material happiness	
MVSc-07	Does buying expensive things make you happy?
MVSc-08	Does having a lot of money make you happy?
MVSc-09	Would you be happier if you owned more clothes that are expensive?
MVSc-10	Would you be happier if you could buy more brand that are expensive?
MVSc-11	Would you be happier if you owned more things?
MVSc-12	Do you feel unhappy if you don't get the things you really want to have?
Material success	
MVSc-13	Do you like children who have expensive things more than you like other children?
MVSc-14	Do you like children who have a lot of money more than you like other children?
MVSc-15	Do you like children who have expensive clothes more than you like other children?
MVSc-16	Do you think other children like you more if you have expensive brands?
MVSc-17	Do you like children who have a lot of things more than you like other children?
MVSc-18	Do you think other children like you more if you have many expensive things?

2. Codebook

Item identification:

Var1: *Video code* = number of analyzed video (1 – n)

Var2: *Codification date* = date of analysis of the video

Var3: *Coder name* = name of the coder

Descriptive data:

Var4: *Kidfluencer* = name of the kidfluencer of whom the analyzed video is

1: Like Nastya

2: Kids Diana Show

3: Vlad and Niki

4: Ryan's World

5: Everleigh

6: The Fishfam

7: McClure Twins

Var5: *Video date* = year of publication of the analyzed video

Var6: *Video title* = title of the analyzed video

Var7: *Number of views* = number of views of the analyzed video

Var8: *Number of likes* = number of likes on the analyzed video

Var9: *Number of dislikes* = number of dislikes on the analyzed video

Var10: *Number of comments* = number of comments under the analyzed video

Var11: *Storyline* = description of what happens in the video in three lines

Var12: *Content genre* = genre to which the kidfluencer video belongs (categorical variable; adapted from Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020; Fernandez-Gomez et al., 2021; Nicoll & Nansen, 2018; Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz, 2016)

1: Tutorial

2: Haul

3: Vlog

4: Q&A session

5: Challenge

6: Unboxing

7: Product review

8: Role play

9: Gameplay

10: Other

Var 13: Educational purpose: 'Does the video have a clear educational value?'

0: no

1: yes

RQ1: materialism

Var14: *Acquisition centrality* = the extent to which the kidfluencer communicates the importance of owning certain acquisitions; can be analyzed by following indicators (all categorical variables; adapted from Oprea et al., 2011):

- **Var14.1:** Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive things?
 - 0: no
 - 1: yes
 - 0: implicit
 - 1: explicit
- **Var14.2:** Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to have a lot of money?
 - 0: no
 - 1: yes
 - 0: implicit
 - 1: explicit
- **Var14.3:** Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive clothes?
 - 0: no
 - 1: yes
 - 0: implicit
 - 1: explicit
- **Var14.4:** Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to own expensive brands?
 - 0: no
 - 1: yes

0: implicit

1: explicit

- **Var14.5:** Does the kidfluencer disclose it is important to be able to buy a lot of things?

0: no

1: yes

0: implicit

1: explicit

- **Var14.6:** Does the kidfluencer disclose they think it is important to get a lot of presents?

0: no

1: yes

0: implicit

1: explicit

Var15: *Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness* = the extent to which the kidfluencer shows emotions of happiness when acquiring new products; can be analyzed by following indicators (all categorical variables; adapted from Oprea et al., 2011):

- **Var15.1:** Does the kidfluencer act happy when getting expensive things?

0: no

1: yes

- **Var15.2:** Does the kidfluencer act happy when getting more things?

0: no

1: yes

- **Var15.3:** Does the kidfluencer act unhappy if they do not get the things they want?

0: no

1: yes

Var16: *Possessions-defined success* = the extent to which the kidfluencer defines success based on the amount or type of products acquired, can be analyzed by following indicators (all categorical variables; adapted from Oprea et al., 2011):

- **Var16.1:** Does the kidfluencer associate owning expensive things with success?

0: no

1: yes

- **Var16.2:** Does the kidfluencer associate owning new things with success?

0: no

1: yes

- **Var16.3:** Does the kidfluencer associate having a lot of things with success?

0: no

1: yes

Var17: 'In general, does the video attach more importance to friendship or non-materialistic things versus materialistic acquisitions?'

0: non-materialistic

1: materialistic acquisitions

RQ3: brand presence

Var18: *Brand centrality* = the extent to which brands are central to the video (dichotomous variable; adapted from Fernando-Gomez et al., 2021, Smith et al., 2012; Tur- viñes et al., 2018):

0: Brand(s) do not have a protagonist role in the video.

1: Brand(s) have a protagonist role in the video.

Var19: *Multiplicity of brands* = the amount of brands present in the videos; numeric variable:

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

10+

Var20: *Factual information* = the extent to which the kidfluencer discloses factual information about the brands or products present in the video (dichotomous variable; adapted from Fernando-Gomez et al., 2021, Smith et al., 2012; Tur- viñes et al., 2018):

0: No factual information provided.

1: Factual information is provided.

Var21.1: *Brand sentiment* = the emotions the kidfluencer explicitly shows when interacting with a brand or product (dichotomous variable; adapted from Fernando-Gomez et al., 2021, Smith et al., 2012; Tur- viñes et al., 2018):

0: Kidfluencer does not express explicit emotions when interacting with brands or products in the video.

1: Kidfluencer does express explicit emotions when interacting with brands or products in the video.

Var21.2: Which emotions does the kidfluencer express when interacting with a brand or product in the video?

Var22: Comments

3. Overview of Krippendorff's Alpha's

Variable	Krippendorff's Alpha	Number of unequal responses
Var4	1	0
Var12	1	0
Var13	1	0
Var14.1.1	1	0
Var14.1.2	1	0
Var14.2.1	1	0
Var14.2.2	0.727	1
Var14.3.1	1	0
Var14.3.2	1	0
Var14.4.1	1	0
Var14.4.2	1	0
Var14.5.1	1	0
Var14.5.2	1	0
Var14.6.1	1	0
Var14.6.2	1	0
Var15.1	1	0
Var15.2	1	0
Var15.3	1	0
Var16.1	1	0
Var16.2	1	0
Var16.3	1	0
Var17	1	0
Var18	1	0
Var19	0.981	1
Var20	1	0
Var21	1	0