

# MediaSmart

OPENING EYES

## Get Media Smart

Advertising and Social Media: a guide for parents



[mediasmart.uk.com](https://mediasmart.uk.com)

# An introduction to Media Smart

**Advertising can be a creative and inspiring world, where ideas come alive with drama, excitement and humour to keep us entertained and engaged.**

Today, young people grow up in a world of commercial messaging that touches most areas of their lives – so it is more important than ever that they understand exactly what is being suggested, promised and sold to them.

Media Smart is a not-for-profit company, funded by the UK advertising industry, that creates free educational materials for schools and youth organisations as well as teachers, parents and guardians. These help young people think critically about the advertising they come across in all aspects of their lives and use real and current examples of advertising to help teach core media literacy skills.

These Get Media Smart resources are designed to provide a comprehensive and engaging introduction to advertising and social media for parents to share and discuss with their children at home.

We know that there are many challenges for modern families<sup>1</sup> regarding digital media. You will be taken through the terminology, the reasons why there are advertisements on social media and which techniques are being used to gain attention. After reading this, we hope your entire family will feel more confident, informed and safer online.

For further information and our latest news please visit [mediasmart.uk.com](http://mediasmart.uk.com)

Best wishes

**Mark Lund**  
**Chairman – Media Smart**

**Time to talk**

**Look out for the 'Time to Talk' sections:**

An opportunity to explore the subject further with your family



<sup>1</sup> Families refers to both biological parent and non-biological parents, for adoptive parents, foster families and households including adults and both young people or children. Parents will be used as an umbrella term in this document to refer to parents, carers and guardians of children and young people.

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# Why do companies advertise?

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Whether online or offline,  
successful advertising  
= **more sales for a company.**



It can also convince people to change brands, build brand loyalty and, ultimately, secure a premium price for products/services. Also, not all advertising sells products and services – advertising can also be used to share information (e.g. about our health), influence opinion (e.g. about building new things in our communities) or influence actions (e.g. promoting political parties and campaigns).



**Time  
to  
talk**

On social media how much of the advertising is for sharing or for influencing opinion, and how much of it is to encourage an action: eg: changing brands or justifying a higher price for their product?





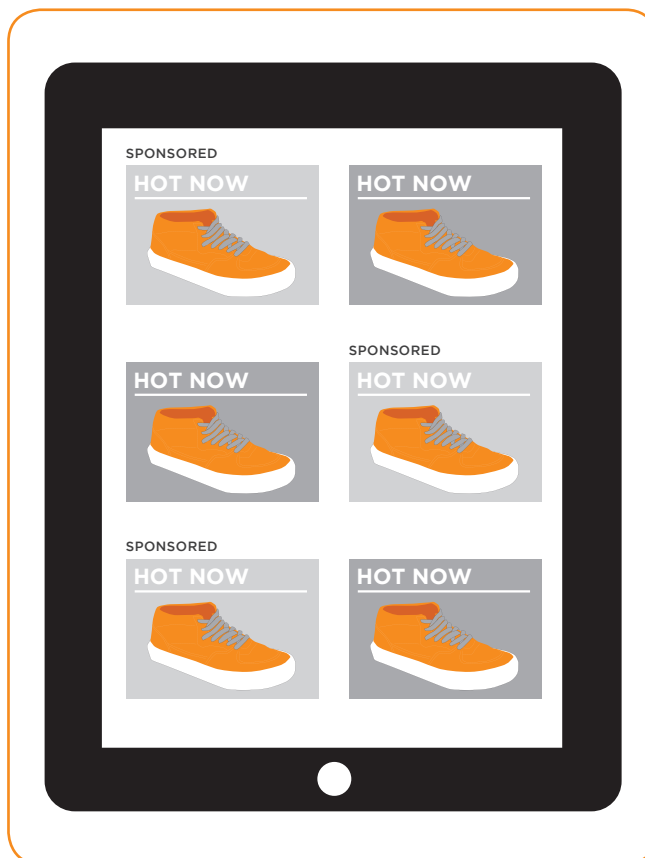
## When is an advert not an advert?



### First, we need to know what adverts look like.

In the past **adverts** in the media were totally separated from the main **editorial content**. Advertising appeared in the space between newspaper/magazine articles, or in the gaps between TV/radio programmes. It was easy to tell them apart.

Today, advertising and editorial content can look very similar. On social media platforms it can be really difficult to identify which is which. For example, **products** can now be promoted in games, videos or even through celebrity endorsement.



Time to talk

Using their favourite social media platforms, ask your family to identify advertisements and editorial content and explain how they can tell the difference?





# What is social media?



Social media allows us to communicate and share ideas with our friends for free, as part of a network or community.

There are  
**five main types**  
of social media  
platforms:



## MESSAGING

Some platforms allow users to send text, picture or video messages, in real time, to other individuals or groups.

**For example – WhatsApp and Snapchat**



## NETWORKING

Some platforms allow users to connect and share with people who have similar interests and backgrounds.

**For example – Facebook and LinkedIn**



## GAMING

Using the internet, games now can include a 'social element', allowing users to communicate and compete with each other.

**For example – Minecraft and War of Warcraft**



## MEDIA SHARING

Some platforms allow users to share the photos and videos that they create. They also offer an interactive feature, so you can create a personal profile and comment on other people's posts.

**For example – YouTube and Instagram**



## BLOGGING/MICRO BLOGGING

These platforms allow users to share their thoughts and ideas as text, pictures, sound and video. Users can also include links to share other online locations. People who use these services are called 'bloggers' while those who upload video blogs are called 'vloggers'. Micro-blogging platforms like Twitter limit users to short posts.

# What is social media? continued

What are the **most popular** social media platforms?



Time  
to  
talk

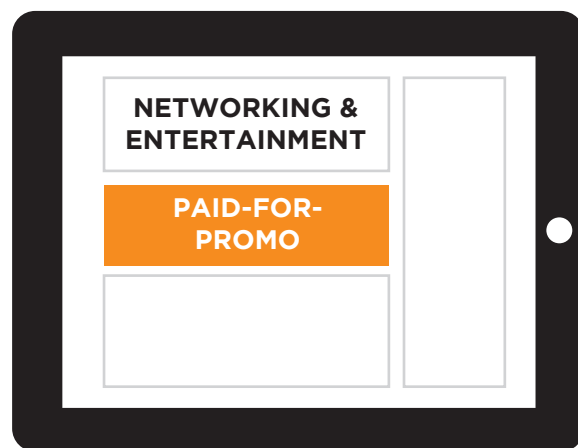
Different types of social media are popular with different types of people. Why do factors like someone's age and interests affect which social media platforms they use?

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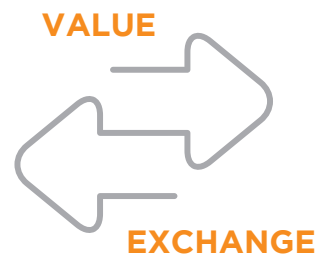
## Why are there adverts on social media?

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If you look in more detail at these platforms, you will see that most actually have **two elements.**



The first is the networking and entertainment space where we spend our time, and alongside this sits the sponsored, paid-for-promotion space. Many people do not consider both elements and the reasons why they exist, but it is important to recognise that when we are online, we are often seen as potential **'consumers'**.



Most of us are used to social media being free, but not everyone realises that there is a **'value exchange'**. Whether social media platforms are free or charge subscription fees, advertising usually finances them and helps the creators make a profit. Adverts may not always be popular with people, but they are economically important for new platforms. This is why new platforms are often launched

without any advertising and then introduce it later, whilst others charge for an advert-free premium version.

Companies spend a large amount of money making sure their adverts reach their target audience and have the right sort of message to appeal to them. Because social media platforms can learn a lot of information about their users, it is easier for companies to reach the desired audiences. Adverts on social media can be a useful way for consumers to find out more about the products, services and issues that interest them.

**Time to talk**

The value exchange can divide opinion – what do you think are some of the positives and negatives of this system?



# What are the different types of advert seen on social media?



**Display advertising:** Banners above web pages and pre-roll videos, such as those that play before watching something on YouTube.

**Paid-for promotion:** Promoting a product or service in a post or within a social media 'feed'. This includes payment in kind – a vlogger may be given free products (or other benefits) in the hope that they will promote them to their followers.

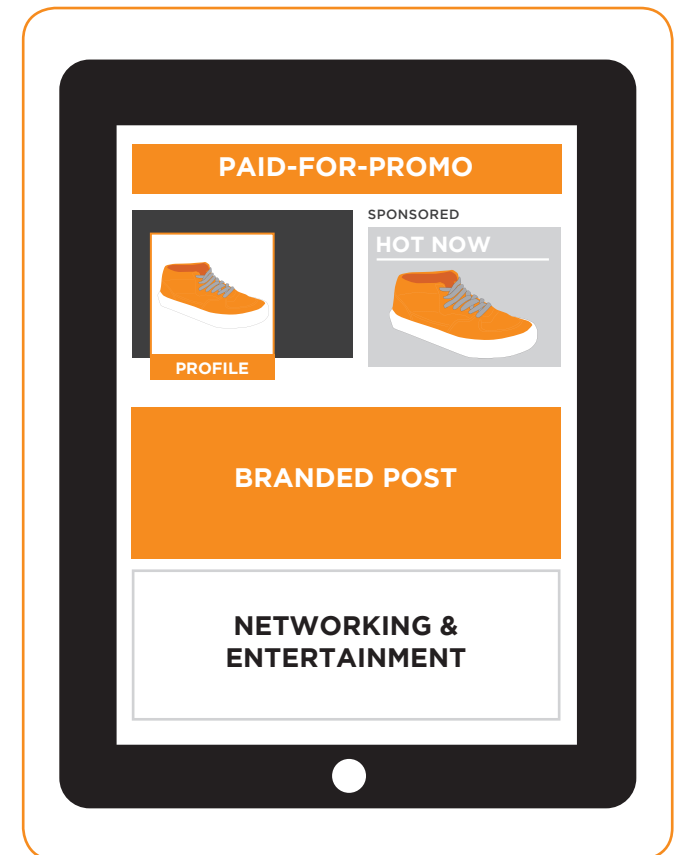
**Brand-owned content:** When a brand has a social media account and uses it to engage with consumers through messaging and networking.

**Advergames:** These are games produced specifically for a brand. They are designed to get customers coming back to a brand location regularly to play the game, win prizes, share information about themselves and invite friends to play.

**In-game advertising:** Uses virtual advertising opportunities in commercial games, such as on pitch-side signs or by product placement.

Time  
to  
talk

Think about which of these advertising techniques are successful and why. How do companies know which advertisements to use for which products and services?









## How do companies know what we like?



When we sign up to a social media platform, the information we provide will be used to generate adverts – matched to our interests and appropriate to us (based on things like our age, gender and location). Once we've signed up, our actions on the platform will influence the adverts we see; factors include what we choose to read, like, comment on and share.

This is why, when we sign up for a service, we should read the **terms and conditions** and be mindful of the information we reveal online and only use **age-appropriate services**. We must be aware of who the organisation is giving our details to, how it may be used in the future and how to control our **privacy settings**.



Once we've signed up, our actions on the platform will influence the adverts we see; factors include what we choose to read, like, comment on and share.



### Remember...



Read the **terms and conditions**



Use **age-appropriate services**



Control **privacy settings**



## How do companies know what we like? continued



### Did you also know that our actions outside of the social media platform may also influence what adverts we see within it?

For example, we might see an advert in the platform for something we searched for and read about on a different website. Some online services may also use the topics and words in our conversations to guess our interests.

All of this information is fed into an automated process called an **algorithm**, which then decides which adverts we will see in the future – how we will be personally targeted. However, you are able to control some of the information fed into the algorithm and aspects of the process itself. The most popular social media platforms all have privacy settings that enable us to point out when the system has made a mistake and shown an advert we don't wish to see or is not suitable for us.

As our online behaviour has evolved, products and services have been created to hide user information from online algorithms and stop consumers seeing adverts. These are often called “**adblockers**”.

**Using adblockers denies revenue to the platforms that provide content and services at little or no cost through the value exchange.**

Time to talk

Discuss how advertisers collect personal information. What information are you happy to share and what would you like to keep private?



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# Are there advertising regulations on social media services?

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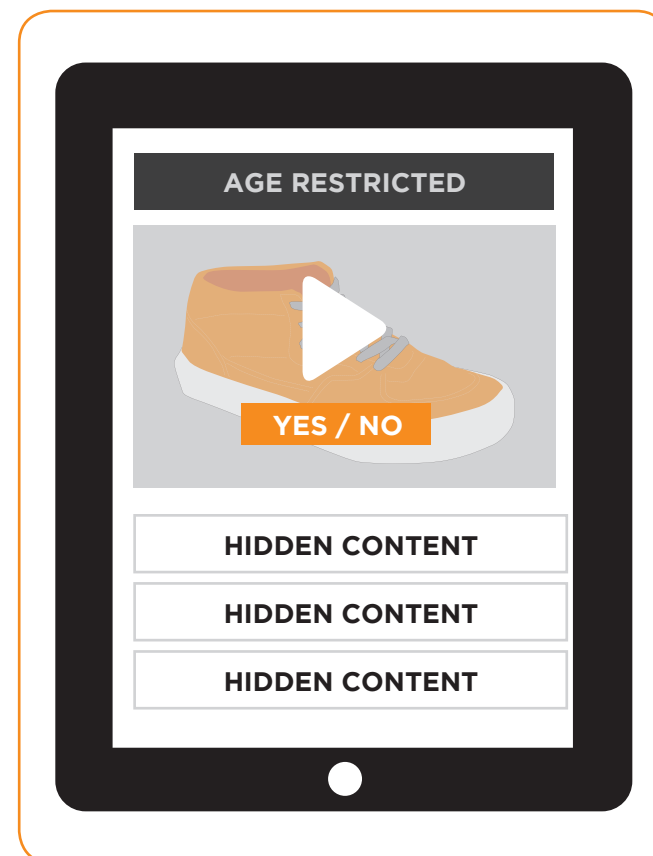
While there are strict rules around when and where these products can be promoted, advertising on TV and online is controlled differently. Advertising is self-regulated by different organisations working together:

- The **Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP)** and the **Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP)** make the rules. These committees are made up of representatives of advertisers, agencies, media owners and other industry groups.
- The independent **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** makes rulings and enforces them, working with **Ofcom** to regulate TV and radio.

If you're interested in discovering more, the ASA publishes its decisions and provides information about its work on their website: [asa.org.uk](http://asa.org.uk).

Time to talk

Discuss why there are age limitations on some websites and not others. What if users say they're older than they are? What difference might this make to the adverts they will see?



## Want to find out more? Then take a look at:

The **NSPCC** provides a range of useful information including: **Share Aware**, a campaign for parents, offering information and advice on how to keep young people safe online.

Link: [nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware](https://nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware)

**Net Aware**, a research tool with detailed information about each social media platform, including the pros and cons of use.

Link: [net-aware.org.uk](https://net-aware.org.uk)

**ParentPort** has been set up by the UK's media regulators. They have joined together because they share a common purpose: to set and enforce standards across the media to protect children from inappropriate material.

Link: [parentport.org.uk/top-tips-for-parents/online-safety](https://parentport.org.uk/top-tips-for-parents/online-safety)

**Insafe** is a European network, comprised of 31 national awareness centres. Every centre implements awareness and educational campaigns, runs a helpline, and works closely with youth to ensure an evidence-based, multi-stakeholder approach to creating a better internet.

Link: [saferinternet.org/home](https://saferinternet.org/home)

**Your Online Choices** is a guide to behavioural advertising, the practice based on internet browsing activity that allows brands to deliver adverts to web users which reflect their interests. It includes tips for managing the adverts you see and how to use the privacy settings on your computer.

Link: [youronlinechoices.com/uk](https://youronlinechoices.com/uk)





# With thanks from Media Smart

**Thank you so much for taking the time to read our advertising and social media guide, we hope you have found it both interesting and useful. If you have enjoyed it, why not share it with your friends and contacts?**

This parent guide is part of a range of Media Smart's free educational resources and has an accompanying classroom resource and a fantastic 'Future Media' competition for secondary schools. Please do let your child's teacher know about this opportunity – all they need to do is visit [mediasmart.uk.com](https://mediasmart.uk.com) for full information and to register.

For the latest news, follow us on our own social media accounts:

[twitter.com/mediasmartuk](https://twitter.com/mediasmartuk)

[facebook.com/ukmediasmart](https://facebook.com/ukmediasmart)

Best wishes  
**Team Media Smart**



## One final tip:

Whenever you're about to post something online, pause and just imagine someone in authority, someone you respect, reading that post or looking at that photo. If that feels uncomfortable, don't do it.

**Online security specialist Tom Ilube**

# Acknowledgements

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