

# Ontological Design as a Framework for Youth Advertising Literacy

EL DISEÑO ONTOLÓGICO COMO MARCO PARA LA ALFABETIZACIÓN PUBLICITARIA JUVENIL

Received on 15/09/2024 | Accepted on 23/11/2024 | Published on 15/01/2025  
<https://doi.org/10.62008/ixc/15/01Eldise>

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**Abstract:** The complexity of the digital advertising ecosystem and its influence on youth subjectivities demand a rethinking of media literacy frameworks. This study proposes to address this issue by recognizing minors as active co-designers. Through a literature analysis and the critical deconstruction of dominant discourses, an ontological framework was developed that comprises four dimensions: (1) ontological principles that re-conceptualize youth agency, (2) pedagogical strategies based on ontological design practices, (3) indicators of critical thinking and creativity, and (4) ethical-social implications of youth empowerment. This framework establishes the foundations for an advertising literacy that transcends the protection-empowerment dichotomy, facilitating the active participation of minors in the construction of more ethical and equitable advertising ecosystems.

**Keywords:** Ontological Design; Advertising Literacy; Digital Natives; Youth Empowerment; Media Ecosystem.

**Resumen:** La complejidad del ecosistema publicitario digital y su influencia en las subjetividades juveniles exige replantear los marcos de alfabetización mediática. Este estudio propone abordar esta problemática reconociendo a los menores como co-diseñadores activos. A través de un análisis de literatura y la deconstrucción crítica de discursos dominantes, se desarrolló un marco ontológico que comprende cuatro dimensiones: (1) principios ontológicos que reconceptualizan la agencia juvenil, (2) estrategias pedagógicas basadas en prácticas de diseño ontológico, (3) indicadores de pensamiento crítico y creatividad, y (4) implicaciones ético-sociales del empoderamiento juvenil. Este marco establece las bases para una alfabetización publicitaria que trasciende la dicotomía protección-empoderamiento, facilitando la participación activa de los menores en la construcción de ecosistemas publicitarios más éticos y equitativos.

**Palabras clave:** Diseño ontológico; Alfabetización publicitaria; Nativos digitales; Empoderamiento juvenil; Ecosistema mediático.



**To quote this work:** Chamat, K. (2025). Ontological Design as a Framework for Youth Advertising Literacy. *index.comunicación*, 15(1), 99-121.  
<https://doi.org/10.33732/ixc/15/01Eldise>

## 1. Introduction

In the era of digital ubiquity, where advertising imperceptibly interweaves with everyday reality, there is an urgency to reconfigure the conceptual frameworks defining the interaction between minors and the advertising ecosystem. Digital advertising, far from being a mere vehicle of commercial information, stands as an ontological agent that shapes realities, molds perceptions, and structures experiences in a continuous co-creation process with its receivers (Hung et al., 2019). This phenomenological dynamic transcends simple message transmission, establishing a field of existential possibilities that demands a radical rethinking of traditional media literacy paradigms.

The minor, immersed in this incessant flow of advertising stimuli, simultaneously finds themselves in the paradoxical position of subject and object of advertising design (Kinnula et al., 2020). This existential duality raises fundamental questions about agency, autonomy, and identity construction in a saturated media environment. Sartre's existentialist perspective, positing that existence precedes essence, acquires a new dimension in this context: the minor's being-in-the-world is largely constituted through their interaction with realities fabricated by digital advertising (Ihde, 2009).

This paradoxical position of minors regarding advertising is not a recent phenomenon but the result of a significant historical evolution in the minor-advertising relationship. Studies in this field, as documented by Raju & Lonial (1990), have traditionally been divided into two categories: those studying the advertising process effect (understanding advertising dynamics and content differentiation) and those analyzing its results (impact on attitudes, behavior, and socialization). This binary categorization reflects the limitations of traditional approaches, which have tended to consider the minor as either a passive receiver or a critical interpreter, without recognizing their role as co-creators of meaning in the digital advertising ecosystem (Pierre Murray, 2011). Since the 1950s, seminal research showed that in nine out of ten households, children not only recognized advertised products but actively influenced purchasing decisions (Munn, 1958), suggesting a deeper interrelation that demands new conceptual frameworks for understanding.

Academic research on advertising literacy and minors has experienced significant evolution in the last decade, as demonstrated by a recent systematic literature review (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2023). Studies have concentrated on six main dimensions: literacy programs for new formats, food advertising influence, influence marketing, purchase decisions, advertising identification, and privacy. However, this field segmentation reveals a fragmented approach that

fails to address the constitutive nature of the relationship between minors and digital advertising. Traditional approaches, primarily focused on instrumental aspects of media literacy, prove insufficient in a digital advertising ecosystem that influences minors and actively configures their ways of being and existing in the world.

This article aims to develop an ontological framework for advertising literacy that reconfigures the relationship between minors and digital advertising. This purpose transcends conventional media education approaches, seeking to provide minors with critical tools to decode advertising messages and empower them as active agents in constructing the media realities they inhabit.

The question guiding this research emerges from the intersection between ontological design and advertising literacy: How can ontological design transform advertising literacy to empower minors in their interaction with digital advertising? This question challenges current media education methods while questioning established conceptions about advertising's nature and its role in shaping human experience.

The proposed thesis is that ontological design offers a revolutionary approach to advertising literacy, allowing minors not only to understand but also actively reconfigure their relationship with digital advertising, thus transforming their media reality. This proposition is based on the premise that design, far from being a neutral activity, is intrinsically ontological: each design act is simultaneously an act of world-creation (Fry, 2012). Applied to advertising literacy, this principle implies that minors, upon acquiring an ontological understanding of advertising, become co-designers of their media environment.

The theoretical framework supporting this research articulates around two fundamental axes that interweave and feed back into each other: ontological design and critical advertising literacy. Ontological design, conceptualized by Tony Fry and developed by Arturo Escobar, provides conceptual tools to approach advertising not as an isolated phenomenon but as an integral part of a system of relations that configures ways of being and doing in the world (Escobar, 2019; Fry, 2012). This perspective is enriched by Harman's (2013) object-oriented ontology, which recognizes the agency of non-human elements in the advertising ecosystem, and Braidotti's (2019) posthumanist orientations, which question traditional dichotomies between human and technological.

Critical advertising literacy emerges as the second theoretical pillar, transcending traditional instrumental approaches. Livingstone and Helsper's seminal works on minors' vulnerability to digital advertising engage in dialogue with Gauntlett's media agency theories, generating a field of productive



tension that destabilizes preconceived notions about minors' capacity to negotiate meanings in the media environment (Gauntlett, 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). This critical approach is enriched by Selwyn's (2013) perspectives on technology-based educational innovations' implications and Morozov's (2013) warnings about digital empowerment rhetoric risks.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives enables a deeper understanding of digital advertising as an ontological phenomenon. From the ontological design perspective, each advertising interaction not only transmits a commercial message but configures a horizon of existential possibilities for minors. This approach dialogues with Ihde's (2009) technological phenomenology, which proposes that technical mediations are not neutral but fundamentally transform our world experience. In digital advertising, this implies recognizing how interfaces, algorithms, and media structures not only communicate but configure specific ways of being and relating to the world.

Braidotti's (2019) posthumanist perspective adds a critical dimension by questioning traditional boundaries between human and technological. In the digital advertising ecosystem, this blurring of boundaries manifests in the emergence of new forms of hybrid subjectivity, where minor's identity is constructed in constant dialogue with the media realities they inhabit. This vision complements Kinnula et al.'s (2020) work on minors' technological agency, showing how interaction with digital environments not only modifies behaviors but fundamentally reconfigures understanding of self and its relationship with the world.

The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives generates a robust conceptual framework that allows approaching advertising literacy from a transformative ontological perspective. This framework not only provides tools to analyze the current relationship between minors and digital advertising but also offers ways to reimagine and reconstruct this relationship from a critical and emancipatory stance. The integration of ontological design with critical advertising literacy opens new horizons for understanding and transforming how minors not only interpret but actively configure and are configured by their media environment.

The study's relevance becomes evident given the growing complexity of the digital advertising ecosystem and its impact on youth subjectivity formation. Traditional media literacy approaches have proven insufficient to address contemporary advertising's fluid and omnipresent nature, leaving minors inadequately prepared to navigate this constantly evolving landscape. This work seeks to fill a critical gap in current literature, offering an ontological

framework that not only reconceptualizes advertising literacy but also provides tools for ethical and transformative intervention. In subsequent sections, the methodology will be detailed, key findings presented, and the new ontological framework articulated, laying foundations for a discussion about advertising literacy's future in the digital era.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was structured in three interrelated phases, each using specific methods to address different dimensions of advertising literacy from an ontological perspective. Phase 1 consisted of an ontological analysis of advertising literacy literature using the theorization through literature review approach (Breslin & Gatrell, 2023). This approach allowed for a more open and creative exploration of the literature, seeking not only to synthesize existing knowledge but also to identify new theoretical connections and possibilities.

The literature review analyzed English and Spanish academic publications at the intersection of advertising literacy, ontological design, and digital youth. Searches in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar used keywords including «ontological design, » «advertising literacy, » «digital advertising, » «media literacy, » «youth empowerment, » and «critical media studies. » The final corpus includes 42 references: empirical research (52.4%), theoretical works (33.3%), and conference papers/systematic reviews (14.3%). Publication timeline: 2020-2024 (45.2%), 2010-2019 (35.7%), pre-2010 (19.1%). Main thematic areas: advertising and media literacy (31%), ontological design and posthumanist perspectives (28.6%), youth and digital technology studies (26.2%).

Based on the literature review, a mapping of the ontologies implicit in current advertising literacy models was carried out, inspired by the ontological mapping method (Kalfoglou & Schorlemmer, 2003). This process involved the identification and categorization of the different ontological assumptions present in the literature, as well as the visualization of their interrelations and tensions, to create a network of concepts and relationships.

Phase 2 focused on deconstructing dominant discourses in media literacy. A critical discourse analysis approach based on Fairclough's work (2013) was adopted, which allows examining how discourses construct and maintain power and knowledge relationships in society. The problematization method proposed by Alvesson & Sandberg (2011) was used to question underlying assumptions in advertising literacy research. To facilitate this analysis, Claude 3.5

Sonnet, an advanced language model, was employed to process and analyze the literature corpus. An analysis matrix was developed that included dimensions such as discursive formations, key concepts, power relations, intertextuality, and sociocultural context.

Phase 3 focused on constructing the ontological framework for advertising literacy. This phase involved a critical synthesis of findings from previous phases, followed by rigorous conceptual development. The fundamental concepts of the new ontological framework were elaborated, such as the shift from passive consumer to active designer and ontological design practices for reconfiguring media reality.

The framework's articulation involved establishing relationships between identified concepts and principles, grounding them in relevant theories such as Escobar's (2018) and Fry's (2012) ontological design, Harman's (2018) object-oriented ontology, and Braidotti's (2013) posthumanist perspectives. An internal validation of the framework was conducted, ensuring its logical coherence and alignment with the research objective, question, and thesis. Finally, the theoretical and practical implications of the new ontological framework for advertising literacy were developed.

**Table 1.** *Methodological approach synthesis*

Phase	Main Methods	Key Products	Theoretical Foundations
Phase 1. Ontological Analysis	Literature prospecting, Ontological mapping	Ontological concepts network	Breslin & Gatrell (2023), Alvesson & Sandberg (2011)
Phase 2. Discursive Deconstruction	Critical discourse analysis, Problem-ization	Analysis matrix, 43 key texts corpus	Fairclough (2013), Alvesson & Sandberg (2011)
Phase 3. Ontological Framework Construction	Critical synthesis, Conceptual development, Theoretical articulation	Ontological framework for advertising literacy	Escobar (2018), Fry (2012), Harman (2018), Braidotti (2013)

Source: own elaboration.

### **3. Results: Reconfiguring advertising literacy from an ontological design perspective**

#### **3.1. Ontological cartography of current approaches in advertising literacy**

The analysis of current approaches to advertising literacy reveals a dichotomy between protection and empowerment paradigms. This dichotomy not only reflects different conceptions of the nature of the relationship between minors and advertising, but also embodies divergent ontological assumptions about the agency, autonomy and critical capacity of young people in the digital environment. The protection paradigm, which predominates in much of the literature and public policies on advertising literacy, is based on an ontology that conceives of minors as inherently vulnerable and susceptible to advertising influence (Oswell, 2008). This perspective, rooted in theories of child cognitive development (Piaget, 1952), presupposes an asymmetry between the persuasive power of advertising and the critical capacity of minors. The ontology underlying this paradigm constructs the minor as a being-in-information, whose relationship with advertising must be mediated and regulated by adult authority figures.

In contrast, the empowerment paradigm emerges from an ontology that recognizes the agency and critical capacity of minors, even in their early interactions with digital advertising (Rozendaal & Figner, 2020; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). This approach, influenced by theories of childhood as a social construction (James & Prout, 2003) and perspectives on critical media literacy (Buckingham, 2015), conceives minors as competent social actors, capable of negotiating and making sense of advertising messages. The ontology of empowerment constructs the minor as a being-in-the-media-world, whose relationship with advertising is an integral part of their process of identity construction and digital citizenship (Clemens & Nash, 2018).

The tension between these paradigms is not merely theoretical, but has profound implications for the practice of advertising literacy. Programs and policies that emanate from the protection paradigm tend to emphasize strategies of regulation, filtering, and control of the advertising content to which minors are exposed (Benedetto & Ingrassia, 2021). In contrast, initiatives based on the empowerment paradigm focus on developing critical and creative skills that allow young people to actively navigate the digital advertising landscape (Smith & Shade, 2021).



However, this dichotomy, although useful as an analytical tool, runs the risk of oversimplifying the ontological complexity of the relationship between minors and digital advertising. A closer look reveals that both paradigms share certain problematic ontological assumptions. Both tend to conceive of advertising as an external force acting on minors, either as a threat to be protected from or as a text to be critically deciphered. This conception fails to recognize the co-constitutive nature of the relationship between minors and the digital advertising ecosystem, where young people are not mere passive recipients or active decoders, but co-creators of advertising meanings and practices (Kinnula et al., 2020).

This fissure opens up opportunities for ontological intervention in the field of advertising literacy. This perspective, inspired by Escobar's (2018) work on ontological design and radical interdependence, would conceive the relationship between minors and digital advertising not as an interaction between separate entities, but as a complex and co-evolutionary assemblage (Latour, 1996). From this perspective, advertising literacy would not be about acquiring skills to confront advertising, but about cultivating the ability to navigate and co-create ever-changing media ecologies.

The challenge posed by this ontological cartography is to conceive of an advertising literacy that not only equips children to navigate the current advertising landscape, but also enables them to participate in the ontological shaping of future media ecosystems. This entails going beyond the protection-empowerment dichotomy to cultivate ontological awareness in relation to digital advertising. This awareness would not be limited to the ability to critically analyze advertising messages, but would include a deep understanding of how our interactions with digital advertising shape and are shaped by broader ontologies of being, knowing, and doing in the digital world.

### 3.2. Ontological implications of dominant discourses on media literacy

The construction of the *vulnerable minor* in dominant media literacy discourses emerges as a central node in the ontological configuration of youth-media-advertising environment relationships (Zarouali et al., 2020). This construction, far from being a mere description of objective reality, constitutes an onto-political act with profound implications for educational practice and public policy formulation (Maqsood & Chiasson, 2021). The vulnerable minor figure stands as a discursive device that, while seeking to protect, paradoxically can limit

young people's possibilities of being and becoming in the digital ecosystem (Feijoo & Sádaba, 2021).

The onto-politics of the vulnerable minor manifests in how dominant media literacy discourses configure a subject characterized by their supposed innate inability to critically navigate the media landscape (Bozzola et al., 2022). This construction relies on an ontology that conceives the minor as a being-in-deficit, whose relationship with media and advertising is marked by a fundamental asymmetry of power and knowledge (Montgomery, 2009). Such conceptualization, though well-intentioned in its protective aim, risks consolidating an essentialist notion of childhood that fails to account for the complexity and diversity of youth media experiences in the digital era.

The onto-political critique of this construction does not seek to deny real vulnerabilities but to unveil how this notion of vulnerability operates as a power mechanism configuring minors' possibilities of being and acting in relation to media. Following Foucault (1980), one can argue that the vulnerable minor discourse functions as a regime of truth legitimizing certain forms of educational and regulatory intervention while marginalizing or invisibilizing other forms of youth agency and resistance in the media environment.

The problematization of the vulnerable minor figure opens paths for reconceptualizing the relationship between youth and the media-advertising ecosystem. Instead of a vulnerability ontology, one could propose a potentiality ontology that recognizes minors' capacity to actively navigate, negotiate, and transform their media environments. This perspective would resonate with Prensky's (2001) concept of digital natives but would go further by considering not just technical skills but also young people's critical and creative capacities in media interaction. This reconceptualization implies developing a media potentiality ontology that recognizes minors' capacity to actively participate in their configuration and transformation.

### **3.3. Proposal for a New Ontological Framework for Advertising Literacy**

The proposal for a new ontological framework for advertising literacy emerges as a radical response to the limitations and contradictions inherent in traditional approaches, seeking to reconfigure the relationship between minors and the digital advertising ecosystem. This framework is structured around four fundamental dimensions: (1) the ontological principles and guidelines that underpin the transformation of the minor's role, (2) innovative pedagogical strategies that materialize this vision, (3) indicators of critical thinking and



creativity that evidence its development, and (4) the ethical and social implications that emerge from this new positioning. This proposal is built upon the results obtained in the previous phases of ontological analysis and discursive deconstruction, grounded in the ontological design theories of Escobar (2018) and Fry (2012), Harman's (2018) object-oriented ontology, and Braidotti's (2013) posthumanist perspectives.

### 3.3.1. Ontological Principles and Guidelines

The need for an ontological turn in advertising literacy emerges from an empirical reality that demonstrates both digital omnipresence and the paradox of critical disconnection in the minor-advertising relationship. Most recent studies reveal that 76.7% of minors between 10 and 14 years old have their own mobile phone, reaching 84.5% at age 14, while only 16.5% actively pay attention to the advertising they receive (Feijoo et al., 2024). This dissonance between technological immersion and critical disengagement not only signals the limitations of traditional media literacy approaches but points to a deeper problem: the need to reconceptualize the relationship between minors and the digital advertising ecosystem from a perspective that transcends the traditional dichotomy between passive consumer and critical receiver. The proposed ontological turn seeks to respond to this reality by recognizing minors as transformative agents in a socio-technical assemblage where advertising is not merely an external message, but a constitutive element of their daily digital experience.

The ontological turn from passive consumer to active designer represents a radical break from traditional advertising literacy conceptions. This turn is not limited to a mere role reversal but implies a reconceptualization of the interaction between minors and the advertising ecosystem. Instead of viewing young people as passive recipients of advertising messages or even as critical interpreters of these, the new framework positions them as active co-creators of the media realities they inhabit (Keating, 2024).

This reconceptualization is based on a relational ontology that challenges traditional dichotomies between subject and object, consumer and producer, human and technology (Escobar, 2018). From this perspective, advertising is not simply an external message acting upon a pre-existing subject, but a constitutive element of a broader socio-technical assemblage in which minors actively participate. As Latour (2004) argues, human and non-human actors form complex networks of relationships that co-constitute social reality. In the context of advertising literacy, this implies recognizing that minors not only

interpret advertising but also configure it through their interactions, choices, and digital practices.

This relational ontological perspective is grounded in three fundamental principles. First, the principle of coevolution, which recognizes that minors and the digital advertising ecosystem develop and transform each other in a continuous process of interaction. As Ihde (2009) notes, the relationship between humans and technology is not unidirectional but involves a reciprocal transformation that shapes both subjectivities and technological materialities. Second, the principle of distributed agency, which recognizes that the capacity for action and transformation does not reside exclusively in human subjects but emerges from the interaction between various human and non-human actors in the advertising ecosystem. Third, the principle of recursive ontological design, which establishes that each act of design not only creates new objects or interfaces but reconfigures the conditions of possibility for future acts of design (Fry, 2012).

The materialization of these principles in the context of advertising literacy requires a deep understanding of how minors' digital practices contribute to the configuration of the media ecosystem. The work of Kinnula et al. (2020) demonstrates how minors' everyday interactions with digital advertising are not mere responses to external stimuli but acts of design that subtly modify the structures and dynamics of the advertising ecosystem. This understanding challenges traditional notions of media literacy that tend to focus exclusively on critical interpretation, ignoring the transformative potential inherent in everyday digital practices.

The synthesis of these ontological principles materializes in a series of fundamental guidelines for advertising literacy: (1) recognition of minors' transformative agency in the digital advertising ecosystem; (2) understanding advertising as a dynamic socio-technical assemblage; (3) overcoming the traditional dichotomy between consumer and producer; and (4) valuing design as an act of world-creation. These guidelines, aligned with Escobar's (2018) vision, establish an operational framework for the practical implementation of advertising literacy from an ontological perspective.

The operationalization of these guidelines implies a fundamental transformation in how we conceptualize and approach advertising literacy. It's not simply about adding new skills to minors' repertoire of media competencies, but about recognizing and enhancing their inherent capacity to actively participate in shaping their media realities. This ontological perspective lays the groundwork for a more holistic and transformative approach to advertising



literacy, one that recognizes the deeply intertwined nature of human agency and technological mediation in the digital era.

### 3.3.2. Innovative Pedagogical Strategies

This ontological turn has profound implications for educational practice. Instead of focusing on transmitting skills to decode advertising messages, an ontological design-based approach would seek to cultivate the capacity to actively navigate and configure media ecologies. This could manifest in pedagogies that emphasize experimentation, creation, and critical reflection on the ontological consequences of media practices (Churchill, 2020).

Ontological design practices for reconfiguring media reality constitute the second pillar of the proposed framework. These practices go beyond mere interaction with advertising content to address the active configuration of systems, platforms, and structures that mediate the advertising experience (Keating, 2024). The goal is not simply to navigate the existing media landscape, but to participate in its constant reconfiguration and reimagining.

A key practice in this context would be mapping the relationships, flows, and points of intervention in the complex assemblage of technologies, algorithms, data, and practices that constitute the digital advertising ecosystem. Unlike traditional approaches that focus on the manifest content of advertising messages, ontological cartography seeks to make visible the hidden infrastructure that configures possibilities for interaction and meaning.

This practice emphasizes how technical and social systems coevolve to produce particular forms of knowledge and action (Luque-Ayala et al., 2024). In the digital advertising context, this involves examining how social media platforms, algorithmic recommendation systems, and data collection technologies configure not only what advertising minors see, but also how they relate to it and what types of responses are possible.

Ontological cartography is not merely an analytical exercise but a performative practice that, by making certain relationships and possibilities visible, also reconfigures them. The act of observation and measurement is not neutral but participates in configuring the observed reality (Barad, 2007). In this sense, the practice of mapping the advertising ecosystem is itself an act of ontological design that opens new possibilities for intervention and transformation.

The practical implementation of these pedagogical strategies can manifest in concrete advertising co-creation exercises. For example, workshops where minors deconstruct and redesign existing advertising campaigns,

collective mapping sessions of digital advertising ecosystems, or projects designing alternative interfaces for advertising interaction. These activities, grounded in Churchill's (2020) principles, allow educators to guide the critical understanding process while fostering active experimentation with media structures.

### 3.3.3. Indicators of Critical Thinking and Creativity

The implementation of pedagogical strategies within the ontological framework requires developing specific indicators that systematically evaluate the development of critical thinking and creativity in minors as co-designers of their media reality. These indicators emerge from observing and analyzing the various ways minors interact with and transform the digital advertising ecosystem, manifesting in two fundamental dimensions: critical thinking and creative capacity.

Critical thinking in this context is primarily evidenced through minors' analytical capacity to examine and understand the underlying structures of the digital advertising ecosystem. This capacity manifests in identifying and articulating power relationships present in advertising systems, as well as deeply understanding how algorithms and technical structures influence the advertising experience. As Keating (2024) suggests, this critical capacity transcends superficial analysis to address the fundamental structures that shape the advertising experience, including evaluating assumptions incorporated into existing interface designs.

The transformative dimension of critical thinking materializes in minors' capacity to manipulate, reconfigure, and recontextualize advertising content. In the context of social networks and participatory media, young people not only consume advertising but actively transform and redistribute it, creating new meanings and narratives that challenge traditional notions of authorship and control in advertising communication (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020). This transformative practice evidences an advanced form of literacy that goes beyond mere critical understanding.

Creative capacity, meanwhile, manifests in the conceptualization and development of new media realities. The proposed framework conceives minors as ontological designers capable of configuring these new spaces, which implies not only content creation but also active participation in configuring the platforms, algorithms, and structures that mediate the advertising experience. As Escobar (2018) notes, ontological design recognizes that each design act is simultaneously an act of world-creation, suggesting that minors, through their



digital practices, are constantly designing and redesigning the media worlds they inhabit.

Ontological experimentation with advertising interfaces emerges as a crucial indicator of this creative capacity. This practice involves active manipulation and reimagining of interfaces through which digital advertising is encountered and interacted with. As Lillvis (2023) argues, these experimentations go beyond mere usability or aesthetics to address fundamental questions about agency, autonomy, and relationality in the digital advertising ecosystem. Minors develop innovative proposals that allow, for example, actively negotiating terms of advertising exposure or visualizing personal data flows that feed personalized advertising.

The systematic evaluation of these critical and creative capacities requires an integrated framework that considers multiple dimensions. Specific indicators include: the ability to identify and articulate power relationships in digital advertising ecosystems; the skill to propose and prototype alternatives to existing advertising interfaces; the development of transmedia narratives that reconfigure original advertising messages; and demonstrable understanding of how algorithms and technical structures influence the advertising experience. This set of indicators enables a more systematic evaluation of the process of empowering minors as active designers.

The development of these indicators not only allows evaluating minors' individual progress in terms of critical thinking and creativity but also reveals the broader ethical and social implications of their empowerment as co-designers of media realities. This ethical and social dimension requires careful consideration to ensure that the transformation of the advertising ecosystem positively contributes to collective development, a topic that will be addressed in the next section.

#### 3.3.4. Ethical and Social Implications

The transformation of minors into active co-designers of their media environments represents a paradigmatic shift that transcends individual empowerment to enter the realm of collective responsibility. This new ontological positioning implies recognizing that design actions and reconfiguration of the advertising ecosystem have ramifications that affect the entire digital community. The emerging agency is neither purely individual nor exclusively technological, but is constituted at the complex intersection between the personal and collective, the human and digital (Luque-Ayala et al., 2024).

The ethical dimension of this empowerment requires special consideration of the social responsibility that accompanies this new agency. As suggested by the work of Luque-Ayala et al. (2024), the power to reconfigure media spaces carries the responsibility to consider the collective impact of these reconfigurations. This implies developing an ethical consciousness that contemplates not only individual benefits but also the broader social consequences of interventions in the digital advertising ecosystem. The ability to influence the configuration of shared media spaces demands a robust ethical framework that guides these interventions toward socially beneficial outcomes.

The collective impact of this empowerment manifests in the emergence of new forms of digital solidarity and social consciousness. Minors, upon understanding their role as co-designers, develop greater sensitivity toward the implications of their actions in constructing shared media spaces. This collective dimension of ontological design, aligned with Braidotti's (2013) posthumanist perspectives, suggests the possibility of creating more equitable and ethically conscious advertising ecosystems. Digital solidarity emerges as a conscious practice that recognizes the interdependence of actors in the media ecosystem.

Specific ethical considerations in this context encompass multiple inter-related dimensions. First, responsibility in handling and protecting personal data becomes crucial, especially considering minors' inherent vulnerability in the digital environment. Commitment to transparency in design practices emerges as a second fundamental pillar, ensuring that interventions in the media ecosystem are comprehensible and auditable by all involved actors. Consideration of diversity and inclusion in proposed interfaces constitutes a third essential element, recognizing the heterogeneity of experiences and needs in the digital ecosystem. Finally, attention to possible unintended consequences of media interventions requires a reflective and conscious design approach.

Ontological experimentation with advertising interfaces, as Lillvis (2023) notes, must be guided by these ethical considerations to ensure that empowering minors as designers positively contributes to the digital advertising ecosystem's evolution. This involves developing design methodologies that explicitly incorporate ethical evaluation as an integral part of the creative process, not as an afterthought. The ability to anticipate and evaluate the ethical implications of design interventions thus becomes a fundamental competency for minors as co-designers.

The social dimension of these implications extends beyond the immediate impact on the advertising ecosystem to touch fundamental aspects of digital citizenship construction. The empowerment of minors as active co-designers of

their media realities must be understood as part of a broader social transformation project that seeks to develop a more conscious, equitable, and ethically responsible advertising ecosystem. This transformation requires a delicate balance between individual creative autonomy and collective social responsibility, between technological innovation and preservation of fundamental ethical values.

The ethical and social implications of this ontological framework suggest the need to develop new models of governance and participation in the digital advertising ecosystem. These models must facilitate meaningful participation of minors in configuring their media environments while ensuring the protection of their rights and the development of ethically sustainable advertising practices. The challenge lies in creating structures that allow minors' creativity and agency to flourish while maintaining appropriate ethical safeguards.

**Tabla 2.** *Synthesis of the proposed ontological framework*

Dimension	Key Elements	Supporting Literature
Ontological Principles and Guidelines	Transition from passive consumer to active designer. Break from traditional dichotomies (subject-object). Socio-technical assemblage of advertising. Co-constitution of media social reality.	Escobar (2018). Harman (2018). Latour (2004). Braidotti (2013).
Innovative Pedagogical Strategies	Ontological cartography of the advertising ecosystem. Experimentation with interfaces and platforms. Mapping of digital relationships and flows. Performative observation practices.	Churchill (2020). Luque-Ayala et al. (2024). Barad (2007).
Critical Thinking and Creativity Indicators	Capacity for manipulation and recontextualization. Design of new media realities. Understanding of hidden infrastructures. Creation of transmedia narratives.	Vanwesenbeeck et al. (2020). Keating (2024).
Ethical and Social Implications	Human-technological hybrid agency. Responsibility in media co-creation. Collective impact of ontological design. Specific ethical considerations.	Lillvis (2023). Luque-Ayala et al. (2024). Braidotti (2013).

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4. Discussion: Implications of Ontological Design in Advertising Literacy

The paradox of designing for ontological autonomy emerges as a Gordian knot in implementing the ontological design approach in advertising literacy. This paradox manifests in the inherent tension between the desire to empower



minors as designers of their own media reality and the need to provide structures and guidance that facilitate this empowerment process. How can an educational framework designed by adults genuinely foster minors' ontological autonomy without inadvertently imposing its own conceptions of what that autonomy should be?

This paradox becomes even more complex when considering the deeply intertwined nature of minors with the technological ecosystems in which they are immersed. Technologies are not mere external tools but fundamentally configure our perception and experience of the world (Luque-Ayala et al., 2024). In the context of advertising literacy, this implies recognizing that digital platforms and advertising algorithms are not simply objects upon which minors exercise their agency, but constitutive elements of their experiential reality.

The implementation of an ontological design approach in advertising literacy must therefore carefully navigate between the Scylla of paternalistic imposition and the Charybdis of abandonment to digital market forces. A possible navigation path could draw inspiration from the concept of relational autonomy (Stoljar & Mackenzie, 2022), which recognizes that autonomy does not develop in a vacuum but in the context of social and material relationships. Applied to ontological design in advertising literacy, this could manifest in creating learning ecologies that provide resources and opportunities for ontological experimentation without predetermining the outcomes of that experimentation.

The cultivation of ontological awareness in digital natives represents the second axis of this discussion. This concept goes beyond mere digital or media literacy to encompass a deep understanding of how interactions with and through digital technologies configure ways of being and existing in the world. The notion of digital natives (Prensky, 2001), although controversial, serves as a starting point for reflecting on the unique ways in which younger generations relate to the digital media-advertising ecosystem.

The challenge lies in cultivating this ontological awareness without falling into the trap of false technological consciousness. As Morozov (2013) warns, there is a risk that digital empowerment rhetoric masks new forms of technological control and exploitation. In the context of advertising literacy, this could manifest in approaches that, under the guise of empowering minors as content prosumers, actually integrate them more deeply into logics of commodification and digital surveillance.

The cultivation of ontological awareness must, therefore, go beyond the ability to create and manipulate digital content. It must foster a critical



understanding of the technological and economic infrastructures underlying the digital advertising ecosystem, as well as the ethical and political implications of participating in these systems. This implies developing pedagogical practices that combine digital media creation with critical investigation of the platforms and algorithms that mediate that creation.

The implementation of these ideas is not without challenges. Institutional and paradigmatic resistance represents a significant obstacle. Educational systems, with their rigid curricular structures and standardized evaluation metrics, may be unreceptive to an approach that prioritizes ontological experimentation over the acquisition of predefined skills. There is a risk that technology-based educational innovations may be co-opted by neoliberal logics of efficiency and commodification.

Ultimately, the transformative potential of the new ontological framework for advertising literacy lies in its capacity to reconfigure not only how minors interact with advertising but also how they conceive themselves and their place in the digital world. By positioning minors as ontological designers of their media realities, it opens the possibility of alternative digital futures that transcend current logics of consumption and surveillance.

However, realizing this potential requires constant vigilance against the tendency to establish new forms of technological determinism or to romanticize individual agency at the expense of structural critique. The true challenge lies in cultivating forms of ontological consciousness and practice that allow minors to navigate and reconfigure the digital advertising ecosystem in an ethical and emancipatory way, without losing sight of the complex networks of power and material infrastructures that sustain it.

## 5. Conclusion

The fundamental contribution of ontological design to advertising literacy lies in its ability to transcend instrumentalist and deterministic conceptions of the relationship between minors and the digital advertising ecosystem. By reconceptualizing literacy not as a set of skills to acquire, but as a continuous process of ontological configuration, this approach opens new horizons for agency and transformation. The notion of minors as ontological designers of their media realities challenges dominant narratives of vulnerability and passivity, positioning them as actors capable of actively participating in shaping the digital worlds they inhabit.

This reconceptualization suggests a shift from pedagogies centered on transmitting predefined knowledge and skills toward approaches that privilege

experimentation, critical reflection, and creative intervention in media systems. Education in the digital era cannot be limited to preparing students for a pre-determined technological future but must equip them to actively participate in shaping that future. The paradox of designing for ontological autonomy illustrates the ethical and practical dilemmas that arise when attempting to foster minors' agency within pre-existing educational and technological structures. This paradox should not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle but as fertile ground for critical reflection and pedagogical innovation.

Realizing this potential requires, however, constant ethical vigilance. An ethics of ontological responsibility in advertising literacy recognizes that each act of design and education in the media sphere has ontological implications that extend beyond its immediate intentions. This ethics could serve as a compass in navigating the complex dilemmas that arise in implementing the ontological approach.

In a world where the boundaries between digital and physical, human and technological, increasingly blur, advertising literacy must become a vehicle for imagining and creating more ethical, equitable, and enriching media worlds. The path toward this new ontology is full of uncertainties and paradoxes, but it is precisely in navigating these complexities where the potential for a truly emancipatory digital future resides.

## Ethics and Transparency

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest related to this study.

### Funding

This study received no funding from any public, private, or commercial entity.

### Author Contributions

Contribution	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4
Conceptualization	X			
Data curation	X			
Formal Analysis	X			
Funding acquisition				
Investigation	X			



Methodology	X			
Project administration				
Resources				
Software				
Supervision				
Validation				
Visualization				
Writing – original draft	X			
Writing – review & editing	X			

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