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Children's Perception of Television Commercial in Lagos State, Nigeria (Pp.334-346)

Gbadeyan, R. A. - Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, Department of Business Administration, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

timigbade@yahoo.com Phone: +234 – 08035755875

Abstract

Television has been described as the primary medium used by companies to market their product to children. This consequently makes television commercial has significant influence on children. The children tend to believe what the adverts tell them about product and fail to realize that its purpose is just to sell product to consumer. However, there is problem of separating television adverts effect from influence of peers, parents, friends, and others. This constitutes one of the major problems confronting television advertising to children. The aim of this study is to determine the effect of children age on their understanding of television commercial in Lagos State, Nigeria. It will also consider the type of commercial watched, what interest the children and promotional theme used to persuade them in the television commercial. Primary data was generated through administration of 1500 pro-forma type questionnaire to the children using stratified sampling. This sample was taken from a total population of 55800 children in ten out of the twenty Local Government Areas in Lagos State. Kruskal Wallis tests used to determine whether significant relationships exist between children's age and reaction to television advertising. The paper concludes that there is need to consider the age which the children should be exposed to television advertisement. Those children under five years should be exposed to too little advertisement while older children (7years and above) can be exposed to more advertisement.

Key Words: Perception, Television Commercial, Children Consumer Product.

Introduction

Advertising is a powerful force in every nation's culture. It exists to sell products and services. In 1750 BC, the code of Hammurabi made it a crime, punishable by death, to sell anything to a child without first obtaining a power of attorney. However, in most countries by the 1990's, selling products to children has become a standard practice. In America, children viewed an estimated 360,000 advertisements on television before graduating from high school. (Strasburger, 1989). There are other additional exposures such as advertisements on the radio, in print media, on public transportation and billboards. Commercials have even entered the classroom through programmes like channel one video equipment packaged with current events programming that contains commercials. The principal goal of commercial children's television is to sell products to children with food and toys being the two most frequently advertised product categories, (Dietz and Strasburger, 1991).

In recent times children are facing a great deal of commercial or advertising campaigns, which are designed to sell products or services to them. Children now represent a significant marketing segment that is being targeted by advertisers and manufacturers.

Literature Review

Advertising as a concept would be considered from two perspectives: the marketing point of view and communications point of view. In regards to marketing point of view we would consider the American Marketing Association (AMA) and Alexander (1963) recommended definition.

“Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, and services by an identified sponsor.”

The communication point of view: According to Wright, Warner, Winter and Zeigler (1978), this point of view does not want to restrict the scope of advertising to commercial function only, it attempts to convey adequately its purpose and the creative communications processes required to achieve that purpose. Hence this definition of advertising is recommended.

“Advertising is *controlled*, identifiable information and persuasion by means of mass communications media”.

The following are some concepts that are also important to our subject matter of the study:

Children - a child is a person under the age of sixteen (16). It can also be defined as a person aged sixteen (16) or over but under nineteen (19); who is in full time non-advanced education. Children according to the broadcast code for advertising to children refer to person under twelve (12) years of age. Hornby (2001) defined children as young human beings who are not yet an adult. The age fixed for children differs from one country to another. In Nigeria and some countries seventeen (17) years and below is the official age for minor or somebody who is not matured (Gbadeyan, 2004). However, for the purpose of this study we shall adopt twelve (12) years and below as the official age for the children being the age commonly cited in past similar research study.

Children Advertisement - This refers to any paid commercial message that is carried in or immediately adjacent to children's programme. It also includes any commercial message that is determined by the broadcast as being directed to children and is carried in or immediately adjacent to any other programme.

Television- This is defined as a thing shaped like a box with a screen on which you watch programmes (Gadsby, 2003). It is also described as apiece of electrical equipment with a screen on which programmes with moving pictures and sounds can be watched.

Children and Television Advertising – A General Overview

Tseng (2001) noted that the 1950s dates the modern era of children's television programming, when a deal between struggling television network ABC and Disney brought the Mickey Mouse Club and Disneyland into children's afternoon television programming. By the 1960s, both broadcasters and regulators realized the growing impact of television on children: investigations on children's television advertising continued in very low level throughout the 1960s and most of the 1970s, a great number of

academic researches on children's television advertising were published (Mc Neal, 1991). Marketers and advertisers during the 1980s heightened their interest in the child market, but research on children's television advertising of that period was mainly replications and extensions of previous studies.

According to Niss (2002) television provides one of the most powerful media for the transmission of commercial messages to children. In a similar vein Postman (1985) refers to television as a curriculum, "a specially constructed information system whose purpose is to influence, teach, train or cultivate the mind and character of youth". Like a curriculum it is assumed that television contains information about the world we live in and at the same time it acts as a vehicle of socialization where knowledge about social roles and cultural values is acquired.

From the advertiser's point of view, television offers unique possibilities for reaching a young audience. Most children love films, television and any moving pictures with sound. These electrical equipments kindle their imagination and bring into play many more of their senses than do the written word or still life pictures. Consequently television can be described as an extremely powerful medium for getting commercial messages across to children.

A review of some literature indicated that in the 1950s, studies were focused primarily on children's recall of television advertising (Brumbaugh 1954), buying habits (Guest 1955), influence on parental purchases (Munn 1958) and so forth.

There are recent studies which also reveal that advertisements and the values they promote are often described as a reflection of culture (Pollay 1986), children were more likely to avoid a toy if they are shown a child of opposite sex playing with it on a Television toy commercial (Ruble, Balaban, & Cooper 1981), Children who are heavy television viewers have a more stereotypical view of sex roles than do light viewers (Greenfield 1984), males and females in children's television commercials are present in dramatically different numbers (Sternglanz and Serbin 1974), children do not relate to television in the same way as adults (Anderson and Levin 1976) , Advertisers' use of a number of devices, including a rapid format and various special effects to gain and hold children's attention (Biggens 1989, Houston and Wright 1989), the relationships children draw between television and real

life (Biggens 1989), the effect these relationships have on their gender role perceptions and development (Courtney and Whipple 1983), their expression of antisocial behaviour, including violence and aggression (Goldberg and Gorn 1978; McNeal 1987), and their expectation that parents should provide products advertised (Goldberg and Gorn 1978), at what stage children can resist commercial message (Ward 1972), children are vulnerable to advertising (Condry 1989), advertising present information that enhances children's social development (Schneider 1987), playmates are the principal influence on children's wants and desires (Goldstein 1998), observational instruments designed to measure children's meal time behaviours and parental influences on child eating (Klesges, Malott, Boschee and Weber, 1986), violent products labelled as appropriate only for adults are actively marketed to children (FTC 2000) and hundred more works not cited.

The main areas of interest that have been studied by researchers can be grouped into two: Cognitive processes and advertising effects (Young 1990).

Cognitive processes:

- Attention to commercials
- Ability to distinguish between commercials and programmes
- Child's understanding of the intent of the commercial
- Child's interpretation of the content of the commercial (including consumption symbolism, gender stereotypes).
- Child's memory for the commercial
- Other processes involved (for example, cognitive defences)

Advertising Effects

- Effect on knowledge, attitudes and values (e.g. does exposure to information in adverts for junk food lower nutritional awareness). This will have short term and long-term aspects.
- Effect on other people, in particular parent (does the child pester parents to buy them things more often because of exposure to advertising?)
- Effect on choice or consumption (whether children eat more sweets after watching confectionery adverts?)
- Do they consume more of a particular advertised brand?

Research Methodology

The study population consists mainly of children resident in Oshodi, Ikeja, Alimosho, Kosofe, Ojo, Ifako/Ijaye, Ibeju-Lekki, Agege, Ikorodu, and Surulere Local Government Areas. The children are both male and female, twelve years or younger in elementary and secondary schools in those Local government areas in Lagos state. There are ten Local Government areas considered for the study out of the twenty Local government Areas in the State. Primary data was generated through administration of 1500 pro-forma type questionnaire to both the children and their parents, using stratified sampling. This sample was taken from a total population of 55800 children in ten out of the twenty Local Government Areas in Lagos State. The children were shown recorded television commercial for 2 hours per day in each Local Government areas of study, in a classroom setting. The video tape was stopped and children given questionnaire that would help to determine their immediate verbal responses to such issues as type of commercial watched, what interest the children and promotional theme used in the recorded video. Ten days were used for the conduct of the study. Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine whether significant relationships exist between children's age and reaction to television advertising.

Statement of Hypothesis

The statement of hypothesis formulated for this study is as follows:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between children's age and reaction to Television advertising.

H₁: There is significant relationship between children's age and reaction to Television advertising.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings of this study are presented and discussed under this section as follows:

Types of Commercial Watched

Television commercials can be product or service commercials. The products commercial are those that create awareness for manufactured or tangible goods while the one for services are in the form of adverts for intangible goods or pure service offered by individual, groups or organizations. Table 1 indicated that 345 of the respondents watched products commercials, while 225 respondents representing 15.4% watched

service commercial. They are 696 respondents representing 47.8% that watched both product and service commercial. We have 191 respondents representing 13.1% indicating that they don't know the type of commercial they have watched. These categories of respondents are under 4 years old children who find it difficult to distinguish product from service commercial. The most commonly cited age, at which children are supposed to be able to distinguish between advertising and programme is five years (Young, 1990). It must be noted also that almost half of the respondents surveyed have watched both service and product commercial.

What Interest Children in the Televison Commercial

The results of Table 2 showed that presentation of the commercial interests the children most, with 418 respondents, representing 28.4% of the total respondents surveyed. Presentation concern the way the product is being used. Products are usually shown being used live in the commercial. For instance eating food or playing with a toy in Television commercial. This is followed by respondents that are drawn to the commercial because of their music, which are 285 representing 19.4% of the total respondents surveyed. The respondents that are interested in songs and Actors/Actresses are 14.7% and 12.6% respectively. The least of what interest respondents surveyed in Television commercial was slogan. In similar studies earlier conducted by Olujide (2001) it was reported that children are usually drawn to commercials because of their Music, Song, Endorser, Drama and their general entertaining nature.

Promotional theme or appeals that are usually employed to persuade the target audience are shown in Table 3. Promotional theme can also be described as product attributes. Television commercials normally employ this promotional appeal to their commercial audience. The promotional themes are briefly described below.

Fun/Happiness - This is the positive association provided by the use of the product.

Taste /flavour/smell – This is any association related to the taste or flavor of the product.

Product performance - This deals with the description of the features and capabilities of the product. Product in social

context- this explains the social situation surrounding the use of the product.

Action /power /speed - This is when action and speed are the primary reasons for purchasing the product.

Appearance - This is when improving personal appearance serves as the main reason for having the product.

Personal gain - This is when there is additional personal satisfaction for having the product.

Texture – It means how it feels when using the products.

It was found in this study that the prevalent theme used to persuade children was Fun/ Happiness (23.2%) followed by Taste (18.4%). Product performance came third with 16.1%. Tseng (2001) in earlier study found that the prevalent theme was product performance, followed closely by fun / happiness. The implication of this is that we can regard Fun/happiness, taste and product performance as one of the important promotion theme used to persuade commercial audience. Other promotional themes are appearance (14%), product in-social context (11.5%), action/power/Speed (8.2%), personal gain (4.9%) and texture (3.1%).

Hypothesis 1: *Effect of Children age on reaction to Television Advertising*
Results from the Table 4 revealed that there was significant relationship between children age and reaction to Television advertising. Therefore, we accept alternative hypothesis (H_1) and reject Null hypothesis (H_0) for both Positive and Negative Reaction.

Table 5 below further gives detail of the Mean Ranking of the Children Age. The result from the Table indicated that children between 11 and 12 years ranked first for positive reactions. This revealed that children between 11 and 12 years show the most positive reactions to Television advertising. They are followed by Children between 7 and 8 years and 5 and 6 years who ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively. The general deduction made from this was that the older the children the more they positively react to Television advertising.

In respect of Negative reactions, children under 4 years ranked first, followed by 11-12 years, 7-8 years and 5-6 years who ranked 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively. The result indicated that children under 4 years have the most negative reactions to Television advertising. This may be due to their level

of cognition of Advertising message. They therefore exhibited a different pattern of behaviour to Television advertising. The other age bracket followed the earlier Pattern observed in Positive reaction. In other word, for children between age 12 and 5 years the older they are the more they react negatively to Television commercial.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The issue of children's perception of reaction to Television advertising has become a very interesting and sensitive one not only to government, policymaker but also parents. It is therefore very necessary to address some of the problems that are associated with this issue of advertising to children.

The Governments of some of the European countries have introduced various forms of restrictions (from few to total ban) on advertising to children because of what they regarded as the harmful effect of advertising to children.

The general belief is that young children do not understand the selling intent behind advertising and where they do, they remain very vulnerable to peer pressure, upon which advertising feeds.

Based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are made:

1. Parents should watch out for Television adverts that mislead children. This can be done when parents watch Television with their children and discuss advertising content with them. In the process, parents would be able to tell the children what they should look for in the adverts.
2. Children should be encouraged to be involved in other activities apart from watching Television alone. If this is not done it can make Television the only activity that children do. Children need a balance of active and restful activities to keep them healthy.
3. There is need to explain to children that the main purpose of advert is that it tries to make people buy things and sometimes these things are not what they really need or they may be something they could not afford.
4. Products that are used by children such as medications, drugs, supplemental vitamins and those labeled "keep out of the reach of children" should not be advertised directly to the children. Efforts should be made to ensure that advertisements for such children products show them being used by children in the appropriate age group and portray a safe play situation. Adults should be shown supervising children when products or activities could involve safety risk.

5. In collecting information from children 12 years and below the advertisers should obtain parental consent, limit the use of the information to only that which is reasonably necessary, provide parent access to information collected and maintain reasonable procedures to protect the confidentiality, security and integrity of personal information collected from children.
6. There is need to consider the age which children should be exposed to advertisement. Those children under five (5) years should be exposed to too little advertisements while older children can be exposed to more advertisement. This is perhaps due to the fact that older children have greater cognitive ability than younger children and they also have learned more about consumer roles.

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Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Types of Commercial Watched

TYPE OF COMMERCIAL	PERCENTAGE (%)
Products	23.7
Services	15.4
Both	47.8
Don't Know	13.1
TOTAL	100

Source : Author's Fieldwork, 2007

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Based on What Interest Them on the Television Commercial

WHAT INTEREST CHILDREN	PERCENTAGE (%)
Music	19.4
Sound Effect	19.2
Presentation (Executional Elements)	28.4
Songs	14.7
Slogan	5.7
Actors/Actresses	12.6
TOTAL	100

Source : Author's Fieldwork, 2007

Table 3: Distribution Of Respondents Based On Promotional Theme Used To Persuade Them.

PROMOTIONAL THEME	PERCENTAGE (%)
Fun/Happiness	23.2
Taste	18.8
Product Performance	16.1
Action in social content	11.5
Action/ Power/speed	8.2
Appearance	14.0
Personal gain	4.9
Texture	3.1
Others	0.6
TOTAL	100.0

Source : Author's Fieldwork, 2007

Table 4: The Summary of Hypothesis Tested Positive Factor – Kruskal Wallis Test

K. Calculated	K. Critical	d.f.	Level	Decision
0.000	20.997	3	0.95	Accept H ₁

Source (i) Author's Fieldwork (2007) (ii) Computer Printout (2007)

Negative Factor - Kruskal Wallis Test

K. Calculated	K. Critical	d.f.	Level	Decision
0.261	4.005	3	0.95	Accept H ₁

p>0.05

Source (i) Author's Fieldwork (2007) (ii) Computer Printout (2007)

Table 5: Mean Rank of Children Age

POSITIVE FACTOR

AGE	MEAN RANK	RAKING
11-12	774.84	1 st
7-8	673.16	2 nd
5-6	658.60	3 rd
Under 4	609.46	4 th

NEGATIVE FACTOR

AGE	MEAN RANK	RAKING
Under 4	784.08	1 st
11-12	757.15	2 nd
7-8	731.63	3 rd
5-6	690.52	4 th

Source (i) Author's Fieldwork (2007) (ii) Computer Printout (2007)