

**Catching Them Young:
Representations and Images of Children in Nigerian
Television Advertisements**

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Abstract

The television medium more than other types of media, represents one of the most powerful media that affect children's development, perception, and identity formation. Children are mostly fascinated by the television because of its audiovisual qualities. This explains the natural preference and affection for television because it not only entertains but also portrays characters in a virtual form that the children can easily identify with. Advertising messages are one of the contents of the media that are often powerful, persuasive, and influential in shaping attitudes and behaviour of consumers. Children have in recent times been recognized as one of the major consumers of these

advertisements. Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on an appraisal of children representations and portrayals in the various television advertisements in Nigeria. The findings from the study suggest that children are portrayed more in product advertisements while young females face stereotypical representations. The paper recommends that more accurate and favourable representation of children in different roles and character formation should be used by the advertisement media as a means to motivate children towards attainment of positive role orientation.

Keywords: Representations, Children, Television Advertisements, Images, Portrayals

Introduction

Today's children live and grow up in a commercial environment where they see many advertisements on television and such advertisements to children remain a sensitive issue (Center for Policy Alternatives & UNICEF, 2003). Perhaps, the worry is related to the contents of these advertisements and the possible outcome to children. As argued by cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1994) repeated exposure to televised content (advertisements) could teach children behaviours that become part of their cognitive structure and behavioural repertoire, so we ask, what type of advertisements are our children exposed to?

The concern could also be understood from the social developmental model by Huesmann (1986), which argues that social behaviour is controlled by programmes or scripts that are acquired in childhood, stored in memory, and used later as a guide for behaviour. Considering the perceived cultural force of

televised content especially on children, who due to the lack of media literacy may have more difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy and a great tendency to identify with and imitate televised characters, the need to interrogate the dominant ethos of televised advertisements Nigerian children are exposed to becomes pertinent.

Advertising is an important social institution and it appears to have strong impact in the development of self-images (Keck & Mueller, 1994). As such, if advertisements depict children positively under a certain dominant role, youngsters are impelled to strive for that particular role or activity. If they are portrayed as rebels or in negative roles, these images are reinforced. On the other hand, if advertisements portray children positively the tendency to form positive attitude because of this exists. As argued by the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1994), through observing the behaviour of televised models, children come to learn which attitudes and behaviours are accepted and rewarded and which are punished, and they will be motivated to imitate media models whose behaviour is rewarded. That is why in this work we seek to answer the question; what models are portrayed on children advertisements in the Nigeria television media? For as Richins (1991) argues, advertising models, their roles, and the degree to which their roles are portrayed either positively or negatively affect children's idealized life styles, although scholars debate the extent of these effects. In addition, advertisements have personal enhancement appeals and social status appeals, which affect a child's self-concept (National Science Journal, 1997).

Television also provides a major source of information about gender groups. If for instance, a particular gender, male or female are underrepresented in television advertisements or portrayed in a relatively narrow and stereotyped roles and activities, exposure to these televised adverts is likely to cultivate gender role stereotypes on the children that will be difficult to

erase in the future. The added concern of this study is to therefore determine the extent gender role differentiations are evident in children advertisements and the extent of underrepresentation or misrepresentation of particular gender apparent in these children's commercials. By looking at the way, gender is represented in Nigerian children advertisements this work contributes to literature in gender role differentiations as it relates to children. All these arguments lead to an appraisal of the dominant images, themes, and contents of Nigerian television advertisements targeting children.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, it has been discovered that media literacy is a serious challenge for the Nigerian child and as such children in Nigeria are vulnerable to media contents, since they are not equipped to understand, discern and wisely consume these media contents, the tendency is for them to see media representations as reality instead of constructions. Advertisement has been recognized as an influential media content that has wide persuasive influence on children. Children are heavily exposed to television advertisements due its audiovisual characteristics.

In view of this, it becomes important to explore the different children television advertisements to determine the different ways children are presented in these advertisements and the dominant images of Nigerian children found in these advertisements. Children representations and portrayals in television advertisements play a crucial role in how the media audiences view the world of children. To a certain extent, it also displays the extent of gender role differentiation in the society, since the images in advertisements as argued by Evripides and Anna (2011) are actually a reflection of society and are therefore prevailing cultural ideas, values and attitudes.

It is often said that children are portrayed in diverse ways

and that certain gender may dominate the other in television advertisement. Evripides and Anna (2011) study examined the ways that children and display typography are presented in printed advertisements with either children or adults as target audience in Cyprus. The data revealed that a stereotypical view of female children is present in these images and this is not only expressed in gender stereotypical traits but also in letterform characteristics. This study therefore, focuses on an appraisal of children representations and portrayals and the dominating gender in the various television advertisements in Nigeria targeted at children, to determine the extent such gender stereotypes in children advertisements in other societies are also apparent in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study tries to ascertain whether certain gender dominate the other in children TV advertisement. In line with this, the specific objectives were as follows:

1. To investigate the dominant images of children portrayed in television advertisement in Nigeria
2. To ascertain the extent of gender disparities being portrayed in children television advertisements in Nigeria
3. To find out the type of advertisement that mainly uses children as characters in television advertisements.

Research Questions

In order to give direction to the study, some research questions were raised:

1. What is the extent of children image portrayal and representation in television advertisement?
2. What is the extent of gender disparities being portrayed in television advertisement in Nigeria?
3. What type of advertisement mainly uses children as

characters in television advertisements?

Review of Related Literature

Over the decades, television has become the national hearth; children quickly learn to use television to pass time. A child's increased television viewing leads to increased exposure to advertising. However, television advertising aimed at attracting and coaxing its audience to perceive the message through sound and screen form has become known as a widespread and influential communication in this modern world, which serves as a powerful tool for communicating sales messages to the target audience (Bovee, & Arens, 1992, Ozoh, 1998). Television does this through incorporation, surveillance, interpretation, linkage, and transmission of messages that have possible effect on audience members.

Television advertising has this special feature of combining video and audio into a powerful sales tool, which not only entertains but also portrays characters in a virtual form that the children can easily identify (Dietz & Strasburger, 1991). Children therefore become fascinated and seem to have the natural preference and affection for television advertisements thereby making them heavy viewers of television advertisements. Children's estimated exposure to television advertising has doubled from an average of about 20,000 commercials per year in the late 1970s (Adler et al., 1977) to more than 40,000 commercials per year in the early 1990s (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992 as cited in Kunkel, 2001).

In recent times, children are facing a great deal of commercial or advertising campaigns, which are designed to sell products/services or ideas to them. Children now represent a significant marketing segment that is being targeted by advertisers and manufacturers. This high level of children exposure to television advertisements makes it occupy a special position within society and helps create images of a particular

product/service or ideas to children, which habitually shape their sense of self and relationship within the society. Johnson and Young (2002) viewed television as “a medium through which children are exposed to advertising and have to deal with ideas, values, and cultural practices through its signifying practices”. These signifying practices provide the words and images with a meaning that is diffused into the belief systems of a society as a code for communication and the children, which form significant television-advertising consumers, are not left out.

The images of children represented and portrayed in television advertisement may have a negative or positive impact on them; the media should be conscious of such images on children since it has been shown that children are not able to use cognitive defences (Brucks et al, 1988). The possibility that they may assist in motivating them towards achievement of positive or negative characters, as is the case, appears, then, as enough rationale for assessing the ways commercials targeted at young people depicts these individuals. In the absence of alternative information, especially parental guidance, the effect of the representations and portrayals of children in various television advertisements can be far-reaching and sometimes damaging. It is also likely that the media audience that rely heavily on the media for information tend to hold viewpoints or display patterns of beliefs and perceptions consistent with media portrayals of children in such advertisements (Nwagbara, 2010).

Since advertising reaches millions of individuals daily, it has become a target for heavy scrutiny by researchers interested in the effects of the representation and portrayal of children in TV advertising on the formation or depiction of such social group. Children constitute a very important consumer segment for the market. Their consumption habits are unique and have the ability to expose them to the traditional gender roles that have been perpetuated in

the society and the media despite the changing gender roles within the population (Brand, 2007). These adverts specifically target at children with a message of what is and isn't appropriate for the boys and girls. Although these may be “just adverts” they are also one of the places that children learn about gender roles, what it means to be a boy or girl and most importantly, the different role differentiations for a boy or a girl. The problem is that within these messages of consumption are lessons about gender roles and expectations. Children's high exposure to media and advertising also exposes them to these stereotyped gender roles, which can influence their attitudes toward and perceptions of gender (Moschis & Moore, 1984). Thus, it is logical to assume that through television advertisement, children can learn appropriate sex roles from observing the actions of others as regards the role models posed in the advertisement. With this pervasive exposure on gender roles to children on television advertising, it becomes expedient to examine the nature of these advertisements being taught and shared, particularly among children.

Children seem to be exposed and to have access to television advertising more than any other advertising media from early stage of the development of the child. As such, it constitutes an important and influential source of information for children in relation to sex-roles; it plays an important role in the development of sex-role perceptions among the children (Moschis & Moore, 1984). Smith, (1994) notes that children acquire the patterns of behaviour more rapidly when there is an attractive model posed in television advertisement. Johansen (2012) further argues that television adverts teaches children a great deal of models about sex typed behaviours because it brings an abundance of readily observable models into the child's own home. What Smith and Johansen are trying to explain is that television advertisements express gender related behaviours of boys and girls portrayed in such television advertisement, which

might be seen as the appropriate sex models by children exposed to these advertisements.

In this regard, television ads have the power to send out gender undertone messages that the children react to after watching such advertisements. Furnham and Spencer-Bowdage (2002) note that boys and girls respond differently to the images they see in television advertisements, that the images used in classing a product go a long way in making such a product to become either male, female or neutral product. Boys are not likely to use a product that the television advertisement classed for “girls” while women are not likely to use products classed for “boys) rather they go for neutral products which serve both sexes (boys and girls). A study by O' Kelly (1974) , examining the advertisements in seven hours children's television programmes found that 67% of all the images portrayed were male children showing the more use of boys in television advertisement than girls. (Browne, 1998; Smith, 1994) also observed that boys are seen more frequently as subjects in children's advertising than the girls. Similar discoveries made by Doolittle and Pepper (1975) found out that 87% of the single gender advertisements were boys only, that the advertisements using female models were almost exclusively for girl child-oriented products. Hence, the idea of gender difference in product positioning.

A study by Welch, et al., (1979) found out that in many cases, even if the product is meant for the “girls”, that girl-positioning advertisements use mostly the boys as narrators and voice overs. This implies a recommendation and validation that boys voices enhances the sales of a particular product perpetuating the notion that the boys can perform better than the girls. Macklin and Kolbe (1984) also found that in female oriented advertisements, that 41.8% used female narrators only, compared to the male-oriented advertisements that used 61.6% narrators.

The above equally agrees with the findings by Ukwueze

(2008, p. 286) on the study of portrayal of women in Nigerian television commercials. Out of 200 advertisements studied, 142 representing (71%) had males portrayed in active professional roles while only 58 females (29%) had females portrayed in active professional roles. Therefore, the female gender irrespective of whether children or adults in Nigerian advertisements are stereotyped and underrepresented in professional roles as there is limited portrayal of women in active professional roles in comparison with the men folk. This reinforces the society's views and attitudes about women.

Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977) conducted a content analysis of gender roles in advertising and found that gender roles are apparent. Advertisements positioned towards girls show models that engage in more passive and fewer physical and antisocial activities than those models shown in boy's advertisements. This demonstrates that in children television advertisements, the most common activities for girls were traditional roles. A research by O' Kelly (1974) discovered that 90% of the boys portrayed in television advertisements were seen to be active while only 10% of the girls were active. Women characters in advertisements are portrayed as younger and more likely to be unemployed and inside homes than male characters (Schneider and Schneider 1979). Boys are presented as more aggressive, while girls are presented as shy and non-assertive (Browne 1998; Davis 2003; Smith 1994).

This attitudinal feature found among the children that are the major consumer of childhood television advertisements was also discovered in adulthood television advertisements, hence, (Kassarjian 1969; Humphrey & Schuman 1984) noted that more African American males than females appear in the television advertisement. Out of 821 African Americans that appeared in the 503 different advertisements, 80 percent are male while the remaining 20 percent are females. A similar study by *Pike and*

Jennings (2005) found that in television advertisements aimed at adults that the males appeared away from the home setting far more than the females did. *Schneider and Schneider* had also earlier in (1979) discovered that 34% of women appeared in the home with only 22% of men in similar setting. It is presumed that similar gender portrayal found in adult television advertisements could as well be present in children advertisements. That means that if children do indeed take what they see on advertisements as examples of appropriate behaviours and gender representations, then the role of television advertisements become central to shaping the perception of gender among the children.

Children love advertisements with their fellow children as the actors, it is a rare case to see a child that does not watch advertisement targeted at children, because they see their fellow children as characters in the advertisements, children therefore watch such advertisements with rapt attention. It has been noted that conventional sex-roles underlie the content of such advertisements targeted at children. Television advertisements have been presenting only one sex or the other to be sex-role stereotypical (*Smith 1994*). It is therefore believed that the children who consume those advertisements that only show traditional sex roles, are negatively affected, because it limits their range of experiences as regards varied sex-roles. What all these studies suggest as did *Evrpides and Anna (2011)* study of children representation in Advertisements in Cyprus is to validate the findings from other study's regarding gender stereotypes in children advertisements. Looking at the plethora of literature we found a scarcity of materials on children representation in advertisements media in Africa and indeed Nigeria. The advertisements we analyzed along with more informal viewing and re-viewing of many television advertisements directed at children seeks to fill the gap in this area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this is the framing theory. Framing refers to a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate about reality. Framing theory explains the inevitable process of selective influence over the individual's *perception* of the meanings attributed to words or phrases. Framing involves the organization of information or messages to give a predetermined focus. Frames give thematic accounts of events and issues. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) make this point clear when they argue that frames are the "central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning" (1987, p. 143) or "a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (1989, p. 57).

Their general idea is that a frame is an ever-present discursive device that channels the audience as it constructs the meaning of particular communicative acts. These communicative acts could be news or advertising messages. Entman (1993) offered a more detailed explanation of how media provide audiences with schemas for interpreting events. For him, essential factors are selection and salience: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52).

The framing and presentation of events, news, and advertising messages in the mass media can thus systematically affect how recipients of the news and the advertisements come to understand these events (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1995, p. 4). The concept of framing, suggests that how something is presented (the "frame") influences the choices people make. How advertising messages and models are presented therefore have the potential to affect choices children make from viewing these

advertisements. In other words, how boys and girls for instance are framed in children commercials influence young people's perceptions and choices concerning gender. Framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic.

The basis of framing theory is that, the media draws the public attention to certain topics, it decides what people think about, by selecting topics and presenting them using particular language, tone and setting to convey a particular meaning. The media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. We find framing in the media as events are presented in certain ways. Framing has originally been associated with news and political discourse. In news, items are presented in a certain ways and topics are selected based on determined categories. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by the media. Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news of the audience. Thus, framing as a type of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it. In advertising frames are used to convey meaning about groups, gender and habits.

The media by presenting certain advertisements in a particular form influences how the public view and understand such advertisements. Television advertisement is an influential environment that if the advertisements depict children positively under a certain dominant role, the (youngsters) are impelled to strive for that particular role or activity. Entman (1993) emphasizes that frames in advertisement highlight some bits of information about an item that is subject to communication,

thereby elevating them in salience. That is why we interrogate the different ways the media frames children commercials in Nigerian television. The media power is not so much about telling people what to think (framing), but rather to tell people what to think about (priming) (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Framing in advertising could be conceptualized as factually equivalent information, ideas, and issues that are perceived differently by consumers by virtue of their presentation. Hence, in advertising context, the emphasis is on how advertising messages are framed in a positive or negative manner.

As these arguments on framing theory perhaps show that children in watching television advertisements, have the tendency to form positive or negative attitudes as a result of what they see. The framing theory further explains that through observing the behaviour of televised models, children come to learn which attitudes and behaviours are accepted and rewarded. Maher (2003) might be right when he says that framing implies relationship among elements in a message because those elements have been organized by the communicator rather than by a researcher. The frames that the media choose to use when reporting on and representing a topic are essential because they can have a deep effect on the attitudes and behavior of the individual by laying out what one should consider when evaluating a variety of issues and applying them to his or her own life. Framing study in advertising might help in better understanding of the ways in which advertisers frame a particular product brand message and the consumers' reaction (in this instance, children's reaction) to the message and its comprehensibility

Method of Study

Content analysis was adopted for this study because of the nature of the research, which explores the manifest content of television advertisements over a given period. As argued by communication

scholars, content analysis remains the most appropriate method in analyzing media content. Children based television advertisements were studied for six months (which represents two quarters) in one television station - Silverbird Television (STV), Awka within the peak viewing hours of 7-10pm (prime time). This station and time was purposively selected on the following considerations:

1. It is a national station with viewership base covering the entire nation
2. Exposure to the station is via both the terrestrial mode and in cable or satellite mode.
3. The children advertisement studied were the same in copy and form across other national television stations such as (AIT and NTA); hence no need to look at other national stations.
4. Each quarter has the same programme schedule and consistent programme offerings in TV stations which are strictly followed.
5. Prime time belt commands the highest viewership across various audience segments thereby leading to their exposure to these advertisements.
6. Being a national station, the results are generalizable to the entire TV stations in the country.

Out of the entire children based advertisements in the two quarters in the station numbering about 20 and 22 respectively, all, were studied bringing a total of 42 children based advertisements. The study was a census as no sampling was made. The study period was from April to September, 2013 representing the 2nd and 3rd broadcast quarter of the station.

Viewing time was 3 hours per day within the prime time belt of 7-10pm in constructed weeks making a total of 21 hours in a quarter (3 months) and 42 hours for the two quarters. One constructed week from Monday to Sunday was used to represent

an entire quarter in line with the earlier mentioned consideration that programme schedules and offerings of broadcast stations are usually the same and consistent in every quarter across the days and weeks. The measuring instrument was the coding sheet. The unit of analysis was children based advertisements. Selecting and describing the categories to be used in a content analysis is one of the most important steps of a study of this nature. Berelson (1971) and Bush *et al* (1983) support this view by stating that a content analysis is as good as the exact description of the categories. Cooper and Schindler (2001, p. 430) refer to the categories as keywords and referential units. For this study, the way in which children are portrayed in the television advertisements constitute the categories, which are summarized as follows:

- A. Types of advertisements that were aired during the study period on the selected TV station.
- B. Frequency of portrayal of children in both genders
- C. Gender and voice over/narration
- D. Frequency of location in the portrayal of children advertisements
- E. Frequency of character realism in the portrayal of children
- F. Frequency of participation in the portrayal of children
- G. Roles of children in the advertisements

Method of Data Analysis

To record the data, a coding sheet was designed on which all the relevant data were noted under the specific columns. The coding sheet used by the researchers contained specific guidelines that provided a detailed and comprehensive examination of the roles children portray in the illustrations. As a quantitative content analysis was conducted in this study, the results were recorded in numerical and percentage terms.

Brief Description of the Measurable Categories

A. Types of Advertisements

- 01: Product advertisements- include all those advertisements that are clearly intended to promote a specific product to a target audience e.g. Advertisements on Indomie, Ovaltine, Always Sanitary Pads, Safeguard, Tomato Paste, Bournvita, Nestle Milo, Blue band, Golden penny spaghetti, Cowbell, Astymin, and Nunu milk etc.
- 02: Services advertisements-include those that are intended to promote specific services to target audiences like those of banks, hotels, hospitals, insurance companies etc.
- 03: Neutral-include advertisements that are not under product or service category eg. Public service advertisements, covert advertisements, celebrity advertisements, and surrogate advertisements etc.

B: Frequency of gender portrayal:

- 01: Male dominated
- 02: Female dominated
- 03: combined

C: Gender and voiceover/ Narration

- 01: Male
- 02: Female
- 03: Combined

D: Advertisements Locations/settings

- 01: Home
- 02: School
- 03: Play ground
- 04: Home and play ground

E: Realism of children characterizations:

- 01: Positive
- 02: Negative

F: Children participation in advertisement:

- 01: Active
- 02: Inactive

G: Roles of children in the advertisements:

- 01: Recreational roles-children are shown doing sports or any recreational activity like playing golf, football, tennis, rope climbing, running etc
- 02: Family roles-children are shown in a family context with parents or grandparents.
- 03: Dependent roles-where children are shown as weak, depending or leaning on another for direction, authority or guidance.
- 04: Recreational and dependent roles combined
- 05: Family and dependent roles combined

Data Presentation

The results of the study were presented under the following headings:

- 1. Types of advertisements
- 2. Gender portrayals of children in advertisements
- 3. Gender Voiceover/Narration

Table 1: Types of Advertisements Aired During the Period in STV

Types of Advertisements	Frequency	Percentages
Product	31	73.8%
Service	11	26.2%
Neutral	0	0%
Total	42	100%

Table 1 above, depicts the frequency of the different types of advertisements targeting at children during the period of study. Out

of the forty two advertisements using children, thirty one advertisements representing (73.8%) were product advertisements while eleven advertisements representing (26.2%) like that of IBTC bank and others were service advertisements. It has been suggested that children have increasingly been portrayed in advertisements for products aimed at them (Enrico1987; Peterson, 1998; North, 2003; Evirides, & Anna, 2011). The data from this analysis appears to support this assumption that children are increasingly portrayed in product advertisements, more than any other type of advertisements. From this, it is evident that children commercials are mostly product based advertisements comprising of foodstuffs, toiletries, pharmaceuticals and other household items.

Table 2: Gender Portrayal of Children in STV

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Male dominated	28	66.7%
Female dominated	9	21.4%
Combined	5	11.9%
Total	42	100%

Details of the frequency of the portrayal of different gender in children advertisements for the study is presented in Table 2 above. Looking at the gender representation of children from the advertisements studied in the above table, 28 advertisements representing as much as (66.7%) are male dominated. The result shows that the television advertisements during the study period portrayed more male children than female. This supports evidence from literature of the existence of the trend of gender discrimination in advertisements across different age categories and the continued invisibility of the female gender in media representations.

Table 3: Gender and Voiceover/Narration

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	32	76.2%
Female	6	14.3%
Combined	4	9.5%
Total	42	100%

The issue of active use of male or female children in voiceover/narration in advertisements is analyzed in Table 3 above. This data further depicts the continued existence of stereotypes in gender role assignments. As suggested from literature (see Eviripdes and Anna, 2011) the most common feminine stereotype was concerned with representation of girls as passive. Data from this table appear to be in line with the findings that girls are more often depicted doing a passive activity in comparison to boys. What this result also seems to suggest is an overflow into the advertisements media of male preference and domination of certain roles, which according to literature is evidence in the society. Further, this corroborates the views of advertisers in the use of male gender for more active professional

Table 4: Frequency of Location/Setting

Location	Frequency	Percentage
Home only	29	69%
School only	2	4.8%
Playground only	1	2.3%
Home & Playground	10	23.9%
Total	42	100%

Table 4, above shows the frequency of location in the portrayal of the children advertisements studied. The results are consistent with the media construction of reality in the

representation of children advertisements in the common and popular environments children are mostly found.

Table 5: Frequency of Character Realism in the Portrayal of children

Realism	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	42	100%
Negative	0	0%
Total	42	100%

Table 5 above examined if the children were realistically portrayed characteristically in the analyzed advertisements. Children are portrayed displaying the real character of children in the advertisements. They were found playing children roles and not adult roles. This finding is in line with the assumption that children advertising depicting children playing children's role is more inclined to attract and hold the attention of other children thus increasing the credibility of the advertisement, and its effect on the target audience, the children.

Table 6: Frequency of Children Participation in Advertisements

Omission	Frequency	Percentage
Active	8	19.1%
Inactive	34	80.9%
Total	42	100%

Table 6 above shows that in the 42 advertisements under study, only 8 (19.1%) portrayed children as being omitted (seen and not heard). This supports the finding in the previous table of the active use of children in children based advertisements.

Table 7: Roles of children in the advertisements

Omission	Frequency	Percentage
Recreational roles only	4	9.5%
Family only	6	14.3%
Dependent roles only	5	11.9%
Recreational/Dependent roles	8	19.1%
Family and dependent roles	19	45.2%
Total	42	100%

Table 7 above illustrates the roles of children in television advertisements studied. What this result shows is that the children used in these advertisements were depicted in a fair and realistic manner as children, acted in a natural way, and was mostly depicted in an everyday situation as a very effective means to reinforce the credibility of the message.

Discussion of Findings

The focus of this study was to capture the representation and dominant images of children in Nigerian television advertisements. Looking at the findings of this study the following conclusion could be made: First, children television advertisements appear to be dominated with product advertisements. This is evident from the data in Table 1, were majority of the advertisements featured mainly product advertisements. This is significant since a great number of children were used in advertisement of foodstuff, toiletries, pharmaceuticals and other household products.

Second, the result showed clear evidence of gender stereotyping and male gender domination in the use of male and female children in the sampled advertisements. For instance, Table 2 and 3 showed gender discrimination of female children in the

advertisements, as they are mainly male dominated and males mostly used for voiceover/narration roles. This agrees with views of these scholars as cited in literature (Kelly, 1974, Dollittle and Pepper 1975, Welch, 1979, Macklin, and Kolbe, 1984 and Ukwueze, 2008) etc.

Third, the study revealed a fair and realistic representation in natural setting and in everyday situations. Table 4 shows that children are portrayed mainly on home and playground setting in children- based advertisements. Depicting children in appropriate roles can also help ensure that advertising message is interpreted and decoded correctly by other children and parents (North, 2003). Other findings suggest gender distribution of roles in favour of the male gender, as shown in Table 6. This point to the fact that children are not usually omitted in children advertisements, rather what is tenable is the gendered distribution of roles in favour of the male gender character of children.

Conclusion

The majority of children advertisements studied, featured product advertisements while gendered representation of children in the advertisements were generally high in favour of male children in terms of roles and dominant images. The children were presented in mostly homes and playground settings and were actively portrayed in different roles. The character realism of children was upheld in the whole advertisements. The findings from this study makes a significant contribution to literature by revealing that stereotypical representations of female exist even for female of very young age in the advertising media. Further, it found that children are realistically portrayed in children's commercial under natural settings. What this work did not do was to analyze the role depictions in line with character formation and as a means of inculcating positive attitudes in children. There is need therefore for future research in this area. Since research has shown that advertisements to children have the potential for affecting

psychological growth and causing negative sociological, attitudes, and behavioural responses (Seshadri and Rao, 1992) there is need for regulating and monitoring advertisements targeting children in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Due to the specific roles performed by the children and their representations in children advertising, the researchers recommended the following:

1. The advertisers should step up allowing full participation of children in television advertisements thereby eliminating in entirety deliberate omission and lack of realism in their portrayals as found in few of the advertisements.
2. Gendered representations of children in advertisements where males represent the dominant images and perform key roles to the disadvantage of the females should be guarded against to reduce the culture of stereotyping in the media.
3. More accurate and favourable representation of children in different role and character formation should be used by the advertisement media as a means to motivate children towards attainment of positive role orientation.

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