

Full Length Research Paper

Content analysis of selected television commercials to children in Lagos State Nigeria

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Advertising normally provides information to consumers about product or service, basically to assist consumers make decisions whether or not to buy the product or service. It is sometimes directed to children who are vulnerable to this commercial message and cannot effectively grasp the meaning because it may be biased and does not give true picture of the product or service. Therefore, it become necessary to understand better the communication processes involved while children watch and react to these advertisements. This paper therefore, examines the content of selected commercial messages to children in Lagos, that is, what and how it is been communicated to them. The sample consists of 430 children, ranging from 5 - 12 years old and their parents. Result from the frequencies calculated indicated that majority of the children were attracted to the music (54%) of the commercial and peer group (25%) play significant role in influencing children purchased demand. The chi-square statistic further revealed that television advertisement does not have significant effect on children ($\chi^2 = 0.367$, $P < 0.05$). In the study the parents (45%) also found that majority of the commercials shown to the children have some kind of disclaimer. The study recommended that parent should watch and discuss content of television commercials with the children and tell them what they should look for in those commercials. There is also need for children to play major role in those commercials for it to have better effect on them.

Key words: Commercial messages, disclaimers, peer group, children's reaction, television product or service.

INTRODUCTION

The study of content analysis of children's television advertising has become very interesting area in academic research and hence there have been increasing research in this area in recent time. The whole idea about the content analysis revolved around understanding the commercial processes involved while children view advertising. This also considers the manner in which children perceive and react to these advertisements. Content analysis was the research methodology generally employed to explore the environment of children television advertising. It was thus a relatively new methodology for consumer research in the 1970's but already broadly use by other research areas such as political sciences, journalism, social psychology and communications research (Alexander et al., 1998; Mc Neal, 1987; Kasserjian, 1977). There has been surprisingly little attention by researcher to the study of content analysis. However, it must be mention about the works carried out earlier in this area by scholars such as

Winick et al. (1973); Barcus (1975); Dolittle and Pepper (1975) and Cotunga (1988). The works of Alexander et al. (1988) and Tseng (2001) are updated version of these earlier works. Previous content analysis studies had focus primarily on what is being advertised but scholar in recent studies had attempted to examine what is being said to children and how it is being said (Palan and Lacznick, 1988).

Advertising industry is trying to develop practices that are less likely to undermine healthy eating habit and encourage a balance diet amongst target audience (Donald, 2003). The US Food system is the second largest advertisers, automotive Industry being the first in the American economy. This shows the importance of Food Industry in terms of her contribution to the Advertising Industry (Gallo, 1999; Story and French, 2004). There is heavy marketing directed towards youth, most especially the young children and this appears to be the desire to develop early among them brand

awareness, preference and loyalty. Marketers believe that consumer develops brand preference before making purchase (Neal, 1999). Television appears to be the largest single medium through which food is advertised to children and the most frequently advertised food product was cereal. There was no advertisement for fruits and vegetables (Gamble et al., 1999; Coon et al., 2002; Taras et al., 1995; Merton, 1984; Dibbis and Harris, 1996; Lewis and Hill, 1998; Chestnutt et al., 2002; Bry - Bredbenner and Grosso, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of content analysis originated with studies by Barcus in the 1970's and these works became summarized in 1980 (Barcus, 1980). In Hasting (2003) content analyses studies, the primary finding was that most of the food advertised to children is unhealthy. This finding is consistent with other similar studies done by Scholars like Dibb, 1996; Hill and Radimer, 1997; Zuppa et al. 2003; Morton et al. 2005; Neville et al. 2005 and Australian divisions of general practice (ADGP), 2003. Robert and Pettigrew (2007) in their study of content analyses identified four themes in advertisements:

1. Prevalence of grazing - snacking was the most frequently depicted by the advert campaigns. Solitary eating was also prevalent in most of the eating situation depicted in the campaigns.
2. Denigration of core foods - this includes such unprocessed foods as (vegetables) for desirable packaged alternatives like snacks.
3. Exaggerated claims - suggestions that natural foods can be substituted for package alternatives.
4. Implied ability of certain foods to enhance additional products benefit such as popularity, performance and mood.

Smith (1994) defined content analysis as the study of the frequency with which certain identifiable element in a given set of advertisements occurs. Doolittle and Pepper (1975) in their study of children's television advertisement content examined five broad areas which include: Element of production and style (form), product presentation, buying rationale, characterization and ambience.

The study done by Tseng (2001) had other additions like promotional theme and disclaimer or disclosures. Given the above theoretical exposures, a brief discussion of the elements of content analysis is presented.

Form

This is the variety of production techniques employed by the advertisement. This may be traditional cartoon, animation or computer animation. Adverts may be coded

for live action, cartoon or line drawing, computer animation, special effects and any combination of the aforementioned forms (Callcott and Lee's, 1994; Doolittle and Pepper, 1975; Tseng, 2001).

Product presentation

This concerns primarily product use such as eating food or playing with a toy. Products are usually being shown being used live, for instance, an advertisements for toys relied on live footage, as did most of the breakfast food and sweet advertisements.

Buying rationale

There are five major rationales identified in previous studies of content analysis and this includes: products enjoyment, products superiority, promotions, pleasing product associations and personal advancement.

Characterizations

This may be the characterizations involving children, teenagers, adults, minorities, sex and anthropomorphic characters.

Ambience

Story lines in advertisement were mostly unfolded in the situational sense; this may be realistic or nonfictional.

Promotional theme

Adverts were usually assigned promotional theme or appeal that best represented the promotional strategy used to persuade the target audience. This may be in these forms; fun/happiness (positive association provided by the use of product), taste/flavor/smell (any association related to taste or flavor of the product), product performance (description of the feature capabilities of the product), product in social context (social situation surrounding the use of the product) action/power/speed (action and speed as the primary reasons for purchasing the product), appearance (improving personal appearance as the main reason for having the product), personal gain (any additional personal satisfaction for having the product), texture (how it feels when using the product, and other).

Disclosures or disclaimers were defined as any statement within the commercial that has the purpose of clarifying any misleading or deceptive message found in the advertisement (Stern and Harmon, 1984). They are

commonly delivered in audio and video. There is no standard format on the message content of the disclaimers (Kunkel and Gantz, 1992). Therefore, when coders interpreted a particular aspect of the advert as a disclaimer, they were instructed to transcribe message into the coding sheet. Adverts were also coded for the absence of disclaimers. Many articles considering the general issue of advertising to children often cite Adler et al. (1980) statistic that the average American child is exposed to 20,000 television commercials a year. The figure of those commercials (20,000) seems too much and tries to suggest that advertisement must be having some effects on children. However, looking at the individual psychology and other event such as number of conversation and interactions the child have with parent and peers or number of television commercial the child is exposed to, that figure (20,000) of commercial is not so great and this means that television commercials may not necessarily have strong influence on the children.

A review of past studies on content analysis had shown that some of these studies do not provide a representative sample of advertising for children, for instance Atkin and Heald (1977) study is a good example of poor sampling. The scholars (Atkin and Heald) chose two days in November on Saturday mornings for their study. However, Young (1985) has established that there are systematic seasonal variations in advertising to children. This study confirm that other time such as after school hours would be appropriate for much advertising aimed at children.

There is also problem of establishing comparisons between past studies, for example, Condry et al. (1988) adopted a random sampling strategy with a framework for both seasonal and weekly variation while Cotunga (1988) or Doolittle and Pepper (1975) selected one day. It is therefore, necessary to develop promotional strategies that would take into consideration this short, medium and long time variation. The major criticism of studies of content analysis is that there is no generally acceptable model for analyzing advertising. Most researchers have resolved to construct their own or rely on raters using coded categories. This aspect may be of interest to researchers for future research purposes.

Methodology

The sample was composed of 443 elementary school children and their parents who are resident in Lagos metropolis. The children were from 10 elementary schools in the area, Fifty eight percent of the respondents were boys while forty two percent were girls. The ages of the children range from five to twelve years old. The parents of the children were contacted and administered questionnaires.

Thirteen of the parents refused to cooperate in the research project, thus resulting in 430 complete sets of children and parents data. The parents constitute 55% percent of fathers and 45% of mothers. Research Assistants selected for study are experienced teachers in the school who are used to taking care of little kids. They were given practical instructions with respect to the research

instrument administered. There are two field supervisor and ten Research Assistants that are engaged for the research work. Each Research Assistant covered the elementary school assigned to him/her while a supervisor covered five schools, making the total schools considered by the two supervisors equal to ten.

An average of 43 pupils was therefore, taken from each school. These pupils were taken at random from their classrooms to a big Hall in the school. The Research Assistants are acquainted with the children and hence, they are at ease with them. The children were shown a 30 min recorded video clip of ten television commercials. After viewing, subjects were interviewed individually and made to complete their questionnaires. They were then returned to the classroom.

The questionnaires instruments for parents were given to them through their children. These questionnaires were filled and returned to the Research Assistants and on few occasions there were needs for follow up, the Research Assistants helped in having personal interactions with the parents. The field supervisor monitored the procedure for the administration of the questionnaires and provided check for quality control of the instrument.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Frequencies were calculated for measurement of what interest children in television commercials, the effect television commercials have on children and important factor (apart from advertising) having influence on children. In examining parents' attitude to television advertising, frequencies were calculated for measuring the presence and type of disclaimer found in the television commercials.

The chi-square statistic was used to test whether or not television commercials have significant influence on children. The result from Table 1 indicated that music from the television commercial interest the children most, with 56.5% of the total respondents surveyed. This result was in agreement with similar studies by Doolittle and Pepper (1975) and Olujide (2001). Doolittle and Pepper (1975) reported that 75% of the advertisement used some form of music, over half of which incorporated singing while Olujide (2001) in his own study said that music, songs and slogans are the most important features of interest in television advertisement for children. The children were asked to comment on the recorded video clip of the television commercials shown to them. Most of the children were able to repeat some music lines from the commercials like the following:

1. Indomie, Indomie, Indomie noodles, Indomie indomilicious and tasty
Sum sum sum, hmmm abracadabra.
2. Multi, Multi, multivite.
3. Ajinomoto, ajinomoto.....ajinomoto for better cooking always.
4. Milo kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa Milo.....
5. Great things start from small beginnings
6. First Bank - truly the first dad's phone.
6. MTN advertisement which portrays a child walking for the first time being motivated by the ringing tone of her

Table 1. Content analysis of television commercials to children.

Measurement	Response	Percentage
Children		
What interest children in TV Commercial?	Music	56.5
	Sound effect	21.2
	Presentation	12.4
	Actors/Actress	10.0
Parents		
Presence of disclaimer in TV commercial	Yes	44.6
	No	54.5
Types of disclaimer found in TV commercials	Audio	13.6
	Video only	21.1
	Both Audio and Video	36.2
	None	29.1

Audio“.....you too can be the one taking giant strides.....”

7. Malta Guinness adverts: I feel good kpan ran ran ran

8. Pampers advert: Better sleep for better growth

9. Peak milk advert: You just need to think deep - and believe in yourself, it is in you.

10. Amatem adverts: Iba (Iba is the local name for Malaria) don finish me o.... Malaria don finish my wife o....

There are criticisms raised by the children's parent against some of these commercials, for instance, in the MTN advert where a child is being portrayed as walking for the first time due to the ringing tone of her dad's phone. The advertisers are seen not to be creative enough by assuming a baby took her first unassisted walk through a distance of about three meters. This is because most audiences have never seen such steady legs for a first time walker.

Amatem commercial also gave the audience the impression that, immediately the drugs were taken, there was an end to Malaria. The criticism raised against this commercial is that a disclaimer statement should have been made telling the target audience that after 2 h of using the drugs the malaria is gone. The claims made that indomie provides protein, carbohydrate, vitamins and calcium has not been scientifically proved. This also is applicable to Milo commercial where it was asserted that “it is the food drink for future champion”. There is no where it has been scientifically proved, that those who drink Milo beverage become future champions. The commercial for the First Bank might have erroneously misled most audience because being the First Bank to be established does not necessarily translate to be first in terms of service delivery, profitability and customer care. That statement therefore is known as puffery. In the

study, about 45% of the parent survey noticed the presence of disclaimer in the selected television commercials while 55% of the parent could not identify the presence of any disclaimer in the television commercial (Table 1). Audio and video disclaimers were mostly used in the selected television commercials and is represented by 36.2% of the advert. The disclaimers are in the form of statement like “the Federal Ministry of Health warns that those liable to smoking may likely die young”, “if symptom persists after three days visit your Doctor”, “if you drink do not drive and when you drive do not drink” and “recommended by the pediatrician association of Nigeria” amongst others. The study further shows that 45% of the children respondents agreed that television commercials had no strong influence on them while 17% of the children respondents were undecided (Table 2). This may be as a result of the short term effect of children's exposure to television commercial. It is believed that more exposure to television commercial, most especially after school hours would have had significant effects on them.

In Table 2, it was revealed that peer group had greatest influence on children (25%), apart from the influence of television commercial on children. Parents and friends representing 18.3 and 16.2% of the respondent's survey, respectively, had influence on children's purchase demand. Children's relation happened to be the least amongst the group that have influence on them. This is so because most relations sometime do not exert much influence on children at home. These relations make little or no significant contribution to the family purchase decision. The result of the chi-square test in Table 3 indicated that we accept the null hypotheses that television commercial does not have significant influence on children at P value of 0.05, hence, we reject the alternative hypothesis that television commercial have

Table 2. Television commercials directed at children.

Response		Percentage
Effects on children	Not very strong	27.4
	Not quite strong	18.2
	Quite strong	20.1
	Very strong	17.3
	Undecided	17.1
Other factors (next to advertising) having influence on children	Peer group	25.0
	Relations	11.9
	Parents	18.3
	Church member/religious	14.5
	Club/social group	14.1
	Friends	16.2

Table 3. Summary of hypothesis tested. Hypothesis: Television commercial does not have significant influence on children.

X calculate	X critical	D.f	Level	Sig.	Decision
0.367	6.905	4	0.95	0.05	Accept Ho

P < 0.05, Source: Author's fieldwork, 2009.

significant influence on children. This may be as a result of the influence of peers, parents and friends as discussed earlier. Most of the children considered for the study agreed that some of the products bought by them are introduced to them by their peer group and friends. Parents also play important role in influencing children purchase demand. Thus confirming the results obtained from the study.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. The formulation of public policies should focus on eliminating commercials on harmful products such as highly sugared cereals, candies etc. This has been shown to be more effective in encouraging the selection of less harmful products such as fruits, vegetable etc. Disclaimers need to be conveyed to children in simpler language that would be more accessible to their understanding. This is necessary, most especially with introduction of new products everyday as a result of technological break through.
2. In examining content analysis of some of the children's television commercial selected for the study, it was observed that most of the advertisement featured children, though presented as major characters in few

cases. There is need for improvement in this regards, children should be made to play major or key roles in those commercials for it to have better effects on them.

3. Marketers need to design commercial that will not only appeal to children but to their peer groups and friends. This is because of the recognition of the strong influence peers group and friends have on children.

4. Parents should be encouraged to discuss with their children, contents of television commercials. This would in the process make the parents tell their children what they should look for in the commercial. It would enable the children distinguish between false or misleading message and those that make subjective claims or statement about product, known as puffery. Parents should be aware that nearly all advertisements contain some measure of puffery, they should therefore try to educate children on how to identify it and make them know that its purpose is to sell the product advertised.

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