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Children's Attitudes Toward Television Advertising: A State of the Art Review

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Children’s Attitudes Toward Television Advertising: A State of the Art Review

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Children’s Attitudes Toward Television Advertising: A State of the Art Review

INTRODUCTION

The issue of children and advertising came to light in the 1970s and has continued to be a topic of much discussion ever since. It started in the 1970s when the Action for Children’s Television petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to eliminate all commercials from children’s TV programs. Then in January 1973, the major networks agreed to reduce commercial time in children’s weekend programs from 16 minutes an hour to 12 minutes an hour (Advertising Age 1999). In 1991, the Better Business Bureau estimated that children in the U.S. watch an average of 3.5 hours of television everyday, which is consistent with 1999 statistics stating children watch an average of 3 to 4 hours of TV daily. The average child sees more than 20,000 commercials during the 1300 to 1400 hours of television viewed each year, with more than 60% of these ads showing sugared cereal, candy, fatty foods, and toys (American Academy of Pediatrics 1999).

Television advertising introduces children to products and to what it means to be a consumer. Children can now qualify as big business for advertisers with their increased spending power. Kids aged 7 – 12 account for $8.9 billion in spending annually, according to Just Kid Inc’s Global Kids Study, with 26% or $2.3 billion of that going toward snack and beverage purchases alone (Pollack 1999). This tremendous spending power creates opportunities for children advertisers, with advertisers spending roughly $700 million per year to make sure their sales pitches reach large numbers of children (American Academy of Pediatrics 1999). Children are considered an important market segment with companies such as Kellogg’s, McDonalds, and Mattel developing advertisements specifically targeted at children.

This content analysis begins by stating the objectives of the paper, followed by a methodology discussion. Next, is an in-depth discussion of the results and conclusions found in each article organized by decade and divided into subcategories. Lastly, limitations of this research are stated, along with recommendations for future research and marketing actions.
OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to determine what is known concerning children's attitudes toward television commercials for toys and food products. This study is based on a three component model of consumer attitudes. More specifically, it looks at the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of children's attitudes toward television commercials.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

Selected relevant studies on children's attitudes toward television advertising were analyzed from the 1970s to the present. The articles chosen were limited to those based on studies concerning advertising showing toys and food products; since these are featured in the majority of television advertisements directed towards children. Journals reviewed included the Journal of Advertising, the Journal of Advertising Research, the Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Marketing Research, the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, and the Journal of Consumer Research. These journals were chosen because they have continued to contain articles that follow the progression of children and advertising and are representative of the literature. Forty-eight articles from this group were analyzed. An additional eight articles from other sources are cited.

The primary data collection methodologies used in the articles included interviews, questionnaires, experiments, record logs, tests, observations, and scales. The three most popular methods throughout the decades were interviews, questionnaires, and observations. These types of methodologies have proven to be most effective when assessing children's attitudes toward television advertising.
DATA ANALYSIS

A content analysis was performed on each article and the findings were sorted into one of the three components of attitude, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Berkman, Lindquist, Sirgy 1997). The cognitive component consists of our beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions about an object or an event. It is what we know, understand, or perceive to be true. The affective component deals with our feelings towards objects or events. These feelings can be very simple, such as like or dislike. The behavioral component refers to actions that are taken, or intentions to take actions. Several articles dealt with more than one of the components and many combined them. As a result of this, some articles are found under different categories.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Results and conclusions will be presented by attitude component across the decades. Within each component, research is organized into common topics and a summary of findings is presented at the end of each decade.

COGNITIVE COMPONENT OF ATTITUDE

The analysis of the cognitive component begins with the 1970s, followed by the 1980s and ends with the 1990s. Within the cognitive component, subcategories of awareness, recognition, understanding, recall, black and white children, and other were chosen to group topics.

The 1970s.

Awareness. Awareness is knowing or realizing that something has been seen, heard, or felt. Being aware of a television commercial involves knowing that something was seen or heard. Younger children, ages 5-8, tend to be less aware of the concept of commercials when compared to their counterparts, children ages 9-12. The younger children often explained commercials as part of the show or identified them by naming products in the commercial (Ward 1972). Many times they were unaware of what a
commercial was. The older children showed a greater awareness of the concept of commercials, explaining them in terms of their purpose, to sell, and occasionally in terms of sponsorship (Ward 1972). The older children were more aware of what a commercial was and could articulate why they are shown on the television.

**Recognition.** Recognition involves being able to identify something as having been known before or as being of a certain kind. With commercials, recognition refers to the ability to identify parts of a commercial after viewing it. Television commercials for toys and food products often contain considerable amounts of product information, as well as premiums to attract a child's attention. Being able to recognize product information presented in a commercial was found to be significantly influenced by a child's stage of cognitive development. The relative length of time devoted to presenting product and premium information also effects a child's ability to recognize product information in a commercial. But the ability to recognize product information accurately does not decline when larger proportions of commercial time are devoted to presenting the premium (Shimp, Dyer, Divita 1976).

**Understanding.** When assessing a child's ability to understand a commercial, knowledge level and the ability to grasp the concept of commercials is looked at. Children, in general, seem to understand the purpose of commercials regardless of the commercial content viewed (Rubin 1976). The older children knew that the purpose of commercials is to sell, therefore they believe ads do not tell the truth. The type of commercial, product-oriented or premium-oriented, influenced a child's level of understanding. A product-oriented commercial just shows the product while a premium-oriented commercial emphasizes the gift that comes with the advertised product. Children viewing a product-oriented commercial understood what product was being advertised and how to use the product shown, while the premium-oriented commercial led to confusion causing the children to indicate that the premium was the product being sold. This confusion caused children to respond incorrectly to the product's use (Rubin 1976).
It is interesting to look at whether a child can distinguish a program from a commercial, or whether he/she assumes the program and the commercial are one and the same. Older children, ages 9-12, were able to discriminate between programs and commercials, while younger children, ages 5-8, were unable to tell the difference between the two (Ward 1972).

Recall. A child's ability to recall elements of a commercial was the subject of several articles from the 1970s. Children, ages 8-12, remembered several images from advertising and correctly recalled a good number of the elements in a commercial. Younger children, ages 5-7, were unable to recall as many elements as the older children. In contrast, when dealing with a premium commercial, the younger children had higher recall scores than the older children. Those children viewing the premium commercial had higher recall scores than those viewing other types of commercials (host selling or announcer) (Miller, Busch 1979). Children recall more elements from a message if they are relevant to them, as premium elements seem to be (Rubin 1976). Overall, the recall of commercials was based on action elements, meaning that attention peaks were higher when there was physical action in the commercial and lower at the more static shots. Children viewing a product-oriented commercial also showed strong tendencies to recall the action sequence of the commercial (Rust, Watkins 1975).

Black and white children. It is interesting to look at whether a child's race affects his attitude toward television commercials. When comparing black children to white children, results indicated that white children had significantly higher levels of awareness of the understanding of the intention of commercials than did black children (Donohue, Meyer, Henke 1978). Black children also had more difficulty in associating a brand with a particular commercial (Barry, Hansen 1973). But no significant difference in recall scores between black and white children was found when viewing host, premium, and announcer commercials (Miller, Busch 1979). In a host commercial, the host or show personality endorses the advertised product. A premium commercial has the last few seconds devoted to a presentation of the premium offer, and an announcer
commercial is one where the announcer appears on the camera and endorses the advertised product.

_Other._ Young children, ages 5-8, believe commercials do not tell the truth when they contain elements which do not match the child's literal perception of reality (Ward 1972).

The 1980s.

_Awareness._ Children, ages three to five, indicated a "vague awareness of product" – by pointing to, touching, or commenting on the advertised product and/or pretending to eat the advertised cereal in the commercial (Macklin 1987). Exposure to commercials increased both the awareness of the advertised brands and the learning of the jingle in the commercials, but there were no effects of the commercials on product or brand preferences (Gorn, Florsheim 1985).

_Recognition._ Having a verbal awareness of what a commercial is, meaning the child can articulate it in words, and why a commercial is shown on television allows for a higher recognition of commercials among children (Butler, Popovich, Stackhouse, Garner 1981). A single commercial inserted in a half-hour program enabled half of the children to recognize the brand name shown in the commercials. More than half of the children were able to recognize specific details, such as the number of flavors of ice cream, featured in a commercial (Gorn, Goldberg 1980). When measuring product recognition of children, by asking them to select the object which closely matched the object presented in the advertisement, the older children performed better than the younger children (Soldow 1983).

_Understanding._ Children's understanding of the intentions of TV commercials occurs at a younger age, six and under, than has been previously reported in literature (Donohue, Henke, Donohue 1980). Even preschoolers understood the selling intent of television commercials (Macklin 1985). Contrary to that, only a few preschoolers understood the informational function of commercials, that TV commercials simply show
products that are available in the store, and the majority of the children were unable to articulate the general purpose of advertising (Macklin 1987; 1983). Children, ages nine to thirteen, understood and learned the behavior depicted in the commercials (Roedder, Stemthahl, Calder 1983).

When it comes to distinguishing commercials from programs, young children know that they are watching something different than a program when viewing a commercial, but do not always know that the intent of what they are watching is to invite purchase of a product or a service. Even preschool children are able to distinguish a program from a commercial, although they do not necessarily understand the purpose of the two (Butler, Popovich, Stackhouse, Garner 1981). In general, the presence of a separator device, by itself, makes no difference in a child's speed of recognition of commercial material or a return to the program (Stutts, Vance, Hudleson 1981). A separator device is something that is used to separate program material from commercials. There are visual separators and auditory separators, with visuals actually showing characters and words on the screen stating that now a commercial is on and now it is program time again. Auditory separators have a voice saying, “We will return after these messages...” with no related video titles or action. Visual separating material may not produce a quicker recognition in children of the fact that a commercial is on. The auditory separator was found to be most effective in conveying that something different was coming on during a program (Butler, Popovich, Stackhouse, Garner 1981).

When children were exposed to a normal viewing situation, where a cartoon was interrupted by a commercial message, some correctly identified the commercial but then went on to incorrectly identify the program as a commercial as well. Those who saw a program segment with actual actors, followed by a cartoon-like commercial, performed poorly with the majority unable to distinguish between the program segments and the commercial. When children saw a fade to black, followed by more of the same program instead of a commercial – five-year-olds easily distinguished the cartoon from the commercial. A correlation was also found showing that as a mother's educational level increases, a child's ability to distinguish between programming and commercials also increases (Stephens, Stutts 1982).
Children's nutritional knowledge and that relationship to television commercials was also looked at. Students with higher grades in school had significantly higher scores on both nutritional knowledge and understanding of nutritional phraseology. Children's exposure to child-oriented commercials focusing on sugary foods was found to correlate with lower nutritional knowledge and a lower understanding of nutritional phraseology. Weekday afternoon viewing, consisting of a mixture of child and non-child programming and commercials, was found to have little or no impact on the child's nutritional awareness (Wiman, Newman 1989). Young children were able to compare information they have about various food alternatives and made choices consistent with their attitudes (Roedder, Sternthal, Calder 1983). Overall, all children appeared to "know" foods they "ought" to eat – regardless of the TV to which they are exposed (Gorn, Goldberg 1982).

A disclosure made with the purpose of clarifying potentially misleading or deceptive statements made within an advertisement is called a disclaimer. Many commercials contain disclaimers in them. Preschoolers' verbal responses relative to disclaimers in commercials appear to be directly related to the age of the child. Age does affect the ability to give correct verbal responses to questions concerning disclaimers and the ability to do so increases with age. The younger children outperformed the older children when asked to identify pictures that best illustrated the meaning of disclaimers in commercials (Stutts, Hunnicutt 1987).

Recall. A higher level of recall, attention, and involvement is found in forced viewing situations, where a child is told specifically to watch TV and the commercials. Recall of specific elements, such as brand name, maybe achieved with a minimal number of exposures to the commercial, three exposures or less (Gorn, Goldberg 1980). On the other hand, results from questions specific to cereal and candy advertisements indicated low processing by children – a low ability to recall elements of a commercial. Four and five year olds were found to be low processors of commercials, meaning they have a low level of recall, with five-year-olds remembering more elements (Macklin 1983).
When comparing aided versus unaided recall, aided recall resulted in better remembering than unaided recall. In aided recall situations the children were asked direct questions about the commercial to help induce answers, but in unaided recall situations children were simply asked to talk about a commercial (Macklin 1983). Direct questions serve as cues that activate advertising knowledge in children. But responses to direct questions may overestimate children’s actual use of cognitive defenses during exposure to advertising. When watching TV commercials, nine and ten year olds do not spontaneously retrieve prior knowledge about advertising, but can do so when cued (Buicks, Armstrong, Goldberg 1988).

Other. Young children, ages three and four, could intuit what other family members would and would not like in television programming and that a stranger, in the commercial, wanted them to behave in a specific way (Donohue, Henke, Donohue 1980).

The 1990s.

Awareness. One article in the 1990s dealt with awareness and found that English speaking children were significantly more aware of toys than were French speaking children living in Montreal Canada (Goldberg 1990).

Recognition. Upper-middle income children recognized more toys than lower-income children and were able to correctly identify the name of the advertised toy shown (Goldberg 1990).

Understanding. Commercials consist of a series of events that occur in a certain order. Both younger and older children were able to discern the causal links between script events and reorder these events in the appropriate sequence. Young children were able to learn the central events of a new script successfully, though the events were presented randomly. They also were able to perform as well as older children in acquiring a new event sequence when exposed to mass audiovisual presentations. With massed presentations, each central event within the narrative is repeated three
times prior to the presentation of the next central event in the scripted sequence. Spaced audiovisual exposures were also shown to children. With spaced audiovisual presentations children were exposed to each central event a single time prior to the presentation of the next central event and viewed it three times in a row. Older children exhibited difficulties with spaced audiovisual exposures when the learning task involved elaborating on the central events and forming links between the events. But without any aids to facilitate learning, older children like younger children, have difficulty acquiring a new event sequence (Peracchio 1993).

When the central events of a script were repeated via massed exposures to an audio presentation, just listening, young children’s learning was equivalent to an audiovisual presentation where they actually viewed a commercial. No difference in older and younger children’s knowledge acquisition was found. Repeating each television script several times before presenting the next one provided young children with the assistance necessary to comprehend the audio presentation and to exhibit performance equivalent to that of older children (Peracchio 1993).

Recall. Children will improve their recall when complete information is presented in both the audio and visual modalities, as compared to information presented only in the auditory modality. Complete visuals show pictures with text and provide audio background. Partial visuals show less-than-complete illustrations with audio to induce imagery. The older children outperformed the younger children in both the complete visuals and audio condition. Older children who used partial visuals to recall the target information recalled better than those who only listened. The partial visuals were beneficial to older children when asked to recall four product messages, but preschoolers found no assistance from them (Macklin 1994).

Children who viewed a commercial immediately following a high violence program had less ad copy recall than those who viewed it immediately following a low violence program. The influence of violence level of a program segment on brand/product recall is not stronger when ad is viewed immediately after as compared to before the program segment. But the influence of violence level on a program segment
on ad copy recognition is stronger when ad is viewed immediately after as compared to before the program segment (Prasad, Smith 1994).

A summary of the findings of the cognitive component of attitude throughout the decades is presented in Table 1. Note in particular that younger children are less aware of the concept of commercials and that viewing a single commercial enables children to recognize brand names and specific details. All children understand the purpose of commercials, but older children understand the meaning of disclaimers better than younger children. Recall of commercials is based on action elements and is improved in premium commercials and when information is presented audiovisually. Black and white children do not differ in their abilities to recall elements of a commercial. Young children believe commercials do not tell the truth when they do not match their perception of reality.

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Summary of the Cognitive Component of Attitude</th>
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| **Awareness** | • Younger children are less aware of the concept of commercials – but do have a vague awareness of products shown in a commercial  
• Older children are more aware of what a commercial is  
• Commercials increase a child’s awareness of brands  
• English speaking children are more aware of toys than French speaking children |
| **Recognition** | • The amount of time devoted to presenting product and premium information affects a child’s ability to recognize product information in a commercial  
• Having a verbal awareness of commercials allows for a higher recognition of commercials  
• Viewing a single commercial enables children to recognize brand names and specific details about commercials  
• Older children can recognize more product information presented in a commercial  
• Upper-middle income children recognize more toys than lower-income children |
| **Understanding** | • Children understand the purpose of commercials  
• Premium-oriented commercials confuse children about what product is being sold  
• Conflicting findings on program and commercial distinction were found - one found that preschool age children were unable to tell the difference between the two while the other found that preschoolers were able to distinguish between the two  
• Audio separators are more effective for children to distinguish programs from commercials  
• Children “know” what foods they “ought” to eat, regardless of TV advertising to which they are exposed  
• Older children understand the meaning of disclaimers better than younger children  
• Older and younger children have difficulty learning new event sequences of commercials without any aids to facilitate learning  
• Repeating audio presentations can be as effective as an audiovisual presentation |
Recall

- Older children can recall more elements than younger children in a commercial
- Premium commercials have higher recall levels
- Recall of commercials is often based on action elements
- Aided recall results in better remembering than unaided recall
- Recall is improved when information is presented audiovisually
- Violence level of program affects the amount of recall

Black and White Children

- White children have higher levels of awareness and understanding
- There was no significant difference in recall levels between black and whites

Other

- Young children believe commercials do not tell the truth when they do not match their perception of reality
- Young children know what TV programs family members like and dislike

THE AFFECTIVE COMPONENT OF ATTITUDE

The findings relating to the affective component of attitude are presented by decades, in the same way as the cognitive component. Subcategories chosen for the affective component include positive and negative feelings towards TV advertising, product preference, parents' reactions to purchase requests, black and white children, and other.

The 1970s.

Positive and negative feelings of children towards TV advertising. Children expressed a great liking for TV commercials and indicated that television is an important source that helps determine what to buy (Donohue 1975). They also were more favorably disposed toward products advertised on TV, than towards products not advertised on TV (Miller, Busch 1979). Young children, ages 5-8, liked commercials with products they liked or possessed and all of the children liked commercials with entertainment, humor, good music, or cartoons. All of the children disliked food advertising and boring or dull commercials (Ward 1972). Message monologues consistently turned kids off to commercials (Rust, Watkins 1975).

Approaching the TV viewing situation with high expectancies of receiving the advertised product results both in more favorable attitudes toward the toy and greater efforts to obtain it. Seeing a single commercial for a valued toy produces more favorable reactions toward the toy, as opposed to seeing no commercials at all.
Children exposed to one or three commercials had no differences in their attitudes toward the toy, but they had significantly more favorable attitudes towards the toy than children who saw no commercials at all (Gorn, Goldberg 1977). Girls tend to have more favorable attitudes towards products after exposure to commercials than do boys (Miller, Busch 1979).

Product preference. Marketers use different tactics to get children to prefer their product over a competitor. Many food products and toys targeted towards children contain premiums that are emphasized in commercials to attract a child's attention. Children seem to care primarily about the gift in cereal, the premium, and secondarily about the taste (Donohue 1975). Although, liking of a premium object does not necessarily assure that children will also like or desire the product containing the premium. But evaluations of a product are enhanced as longer portions of a commercial are devoted to the presentation of the premium (Shimp, Dyer, Divita 1976).

Children's family income and that relation to product preference was looked at. Middle class children prefer non-interactive toys and receive most of the toys that they request. Upper class children also receive most of the products they request, but prefer competition games, toys, clothing, and sport items (Caron, Ward 1975).

Parents' reactions to children's requests. When children request products they have seen advertised, their parents can either accede or deny these requests. There is little evidence that exposure to a television commercial will generate more negative feelings toward a parent who refuses a particular request. On the other hand, a child can experience greater personal unhappiness when he has seen a TV ad for a product and is denied it (Goldberg, Gorn 1978).

Black and white children. Black children's stated preferences for products are positively influenced by the presence of black characters in a commercial. White children's preferences seem to not be affected by the presence or absence of black characters in a commercial (Barry, Hansen 1973). Overall, when viewing a commercial
for cereal, there were no significant differences in attitudes between black and white children toward the advertised product (Miller, Busch 1979).

Other. The premium, host selling, and announcer commercials did not produce any significant differences on attitude in children ages five to twelve (Miller, Busch 1979).

The 1980s.

Positive and negative feelings of children towards TV advertising. Children viewed different program segments and commercials designed to appeal to either children or adults and their understanding of market segmentation was tested. They were asked to decide what program segments their family members would prefer to watch. Children indicated significantly more preference for children’s segments for themselves and their siblings than any of the other categories. Children indicated significantly more preference for adult segments for their mother and father than for themselves and siblings. They also reported a high percentage of self-liking for children’s segments and that adult segments were for parents (Donohue, Henke, Donohue 1980).

Children reported a high identification with parents in the dislike categories for both adult and children’s segments indicating that if their parents disliked the segment or the commercial, they would also dislike it. They also tended to dislike adult segments and said their siblings would also dislike them, but that adults would like them (Donohue, Henke, Donohue 1980). When exposed to the same commercial three or five times, children became annoyed by the repetitions (Gorn, Goldberg 1980).

Fourth graders who viewed a product shown in a more favorable light exhibited a greater preference for the advertised product as a prize, than did fourth graders who viewed the same product shown in a less favorable light. Overall, attitudes toward products shown in the commercial were significantly more favorable for children in favorable attitude condition than for those in less favorable condition (Roedder, Sternthal, Calder 1983).
Children whose parents see themselves as more strictly controlling their child's viewing behavior have more negative attitudes toward television advertising. Children who talk with their parents more frequently about TV advertising and commercials in general tend to have attitudes about TV advertising which are further removed from those of their parents, than do children who interact less frequently. A possible explanation for this is that parents who recognize a substantial difference between their own attitudes and those of their children may make more of an effort to interact with their child. Also, a more open environment with the free flow of ideas between parent and child encourages more independent thinking and expression on the part of the child (Wiman 1983).

Product preference. A single commercial for a product has an impact on a child's preference measure, causing them to prefer the advertised product over a product that is not advertised (Heslop, Ryans 1980). Although when children, ages 3-6, have predispositions about a product, multiple exposures to commercials, regardless of type, have little impact on the child's preferences. It was also found that when a child has experience with a product, she is not influenced by TV advertisements (Clarke 1984).

Other. Young children can be effective decision-makers and are capable of forming attitudes on the basis of information presented in TV commercials. Fourth and eighth graders exhibited the same attitude change as a function of commercial manipulation and showed a great deal of attitude-behavior consistency when viewing the more favorable or less favorable commercial (Roedder, Sternthal, Calder 1983).

The 1990s.

Positive and negative feelings of children towards TV advertising. French and English speaking children exposed to more American Childrens Commercial TV (ACTV) in Montreal Canada responded more positively to products advertised on those programs than did children exposed to less ACTV. Children who viewed a commercial immediately following a high violence program had less favorable attitudes toward the advertisement in general, and less favorable attitudes toward the specific advertised
brand than those who viewed it immediately following a low violence program (Prasad, Smith 1994).

A summary of the findings relating to the affective component of attitude is shown in Table 2. Notice that children like commercials with humor, music, and cartoons and dislike message monologues, boring, and dull commercials. Girls tend to have more favorable attitudes than boys toward advertised products. High violence programs lead to less favorable attitudes toward ads. Children prefer products with premiums and middle-class children prefer non-interactive toys while upper-class children prefer competition games. Denying a purchase request does not necessarily affect a child. Black children’s product preferences are positively influenced by the presence of black characters in a commercial.

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<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Summary of the Affective Component of Attitude</th>
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| **Positive and negative feelings** | • **Likes:**  
- Commercials with entertainment, humor, good music and cartoons  
- Children segments  
• **Dislikes:**  
- Food advertising, message monologues, boring and dull commercials  
- Adult segments  
- Repetitive commercials  
• **Favorable attitudes:**  
- High expectancies of receiving product results in more favorable attitudes  
- Seeing a single commercial produces more favorable reactions toward product  
- Girls have more favorable attitudes than boys toward advertised products  
• **Less favorable attitudes:**  
- Children whose parents strictly control their viewing habits have more negative attitudes toward TV advertising  
- Viewing high violence programs leads to less favorable attitudes toward ad |
| **Product preference** | • Children prefer products with premiums  
• A single commercial impacts a child’s preference for the advertised product  
• TV advertisements do not affect product preference when a child has experience with or predispositions about a product  
• Middle-class children prefer non-interactive toys  
• Upper-class children prefer competition games |
| **Parents reactions to purchase requests** | • Purchase requests that are denied can have no affect on the child or cause them greater personal unhappiness |
| **Black and white children** | • Black children’s product preferences are positively influence by the presence of black characters in a commercial – while white children are not affected  
• No significant differences in attitudes toward advertised products were found between black and white children |
| **Other** | • The type of commercial, premium, host-selling, or announcer, does not affect attitudes |
THE BEHAVIORAL COMPONENT OF ATTITUDE

Findings relating to the behavioral component of attitude are ordered chronologically by decade as in the previous two sections. Subcategories chosen for the behavioral component include the influence of TV ads on choices, children’s requests, income tied to purchase, black and white children, TV viewing time, and other.

The 1970s.

*Influence of TV ads on choices.* A child is more likely to choose a never seen before brand that he sees advertised on TV, over another previously unknown brand that he has not seen advertised (Resnik, Stern 1977). Children’s short-term snack and breakfast preferences tend to reflect their exposure experience to commercials for the products. Children who were exposed to a pro-nutritional program selected significantly fewer sugared snack and breakfast foods than children who were not exposed to any program. The pro-nutritional program was successful in changing children’s short-term preferences, even in the face of typical commercials for highly sugared snack and breakfast foods. Children viewing sugared snack and breakfast food commercials chose more sugared foods than those viewing public service announcements for more wholesome snack and breakfast foods. Overall, children who viewed commercials for sugared foods tended to select more sugared foods than those who saw no messages at all (Goldberg, Gom, Gibson 1978).

Commercials containing premium offers for breakfast cereals are superior to host-selling and announcer commercials in stimulating children to select the advertised product. Correct selection of the advertised cereal did not differ between boys and girls (Miller, Busch 1979). Placing children in an unnatural, forced viewing situation may produce subtle contamination toward the advertised product, which may overstate the effects of normal viewing situations on brand choice behavior (Resnik, Stern 1977).

TV advertising was the single most dominant influence on children’s toy and game choices, when compared to catalogs, personal influences, and store displays (Robertson, Rossiter 1976). TV advertising creates desire for toys among small children and parents respond to their requests by buying the toys (Frideres 1973). Increases in toy and game choices over peak advertising periods -- before the
Christmas holiday – were observed in three age groups of first, third, and fifth graders (Robertson, Rossiter 1976).

It took three commercials to induce children to try harder to win the advertised toy, while those viewing zero or one commercial worked about the same amount of time (Gorn, Goldberg 1977). Seeing a single commercial for a valued toy produces more favorable reactions to the toy and increases motivated behavior to obtain it, but further exposure does not increase a child’s efforts to obtain the advertised toy (Goldberg, Gorn 1974).

*Children’s requests.* A large percentage of parents buy toys on the basis of their children’s desires which have been stimulated by television advertising (Frideres 1973). Children request products sold by TV characters they like and often ask parents for the products while shopping (Donohue 1975). A short term increase in requests of boys in first through fifth grades for toys and games during a campaign period were observed within each age group (Robertson, Rossiter 1976). Parents mediate requests, regardless of their social class, and middle class children make more gift requests than upper class children (Caron, Ward 1975).

*Income tied to purchase.* Both middle and upper class parents selectively yield to purchase requests by only fulfilling a few of those requests. Upper class parents were more likely to buy competition games, toys, clothing and sport items, over parents of other classes (Caron, Ward 1975).

*Black and white children.* When looking at one school classroom of black students and one classroom of white students from two different suburbs in the same city, a large majority of recall questions produced similar response patterns from the two groups when asked about a commercial, a character, or the brand in it (Barry, Hansen 1973). But it was also found that when looking at children with similar socioeconomic backgrounds but different races, a significantly higher percentage of white children than black children selected the advertised product (Miller, Busch 1979).
Other. While the impact of ads on television may not affect all children directly, informal communication between children about advertised products creates needs for those not exposed to the ads in an indirect manner (Frideres 1973). Young children attended somewhat closer to commercials than older children, primarily at the end of the commercial when children were shown using and enjoying the product (Rust, Watkins 1975). Commercials showing preschoolers having fun and playing with a product could potentially increase a child's motivation to acquire and spend more time with toys as opposed to playing with their peers (Goldberg, Gorn 1978).

The 1980s.

Influence of TV ads on choices. Children's beverage and snack food choices are significantly affected by exposure to different televised food messages. Children tend to choose products that they have seen advertised. Children who viewed a candy commercial for sweets picked significantly less fruit and chose candy over fruit more often than children who viewed commercials for fruit (oranges, orange juice, apples, grapes), pro-nutritional public service announcements, or no commercials at all (Gorn, Goldberg 1982). Children exposed to a Kool Aid commercial selected the most candy and Kool Aid and the least orange juice. Children who viewed an orange juice commercial selected the most orange juice. Not being exposed to any message was as effective as a fruit commercial or a pro-nutritional public service announcement in encouraging children to pick fruit (Gorn, Goldberg 1982). When it came to candy, older children selected their preferred alternative for candy regardless of advertising (Roedder, Stemthal, Calder 1983). Younger children chose the advertised product more often when exposed to advertising showing the product in a more favorable light and reject it when the advertising shows the product in a less favorable light. When younger children are faced with a choice among a large number of food alternatives, they seem to be less able than older children to engage in alternative comparison and inconsistency results (Roedder, Stemthal, Calder 1983).

For toy and games choices, when a choice had to be made between an advertised toy and a comparable toy not advertised on TV, the commercial had a positive effect in influencing the child to select the advertised toy (Clarke 1984).
Increasing the number of exposures of a commercial had a positive effect on children’s preferences and behaviors, provided there were no more than three repetitive exposures. Some evidence of negative effects were revealed after five repetitive exposures to the same commercial. But altering preferences and behavior may require additional exposures, as well as a varied set of commercials (Gorn, Goldberg 1980). When watching a less favorable program, one exposure appears to have been sufficient for both boys and girls to give them a position when making choices in deciding which is the best toy (Clarke 1984). Only those children exposed to five different commercials were more likely to select the advertised product, ice cream, over other snack foods when compared to children viewing one or three commercials (Gorn, Goldberg 1980).

Children’s requests. Children who talk with their parents more frequently about television advertising and commercials, make more purchase requests than those that do not (Wiman 1983). Requests by children for products/brands do not seem to take the form of a constant barrage of demands toward parents, nor is TV advertising perceived as the major influence in stimulating product request. The most frequently used request strategy by children is “just asking” and the most common response by mothers is to accede their children’s requests. The amount of conflict caused by requests appears to be quite low. Older children do not have to ask for particular products because their mothers already know their desires and frequently buy accordingly. Older children also ask for products less frequently than younger children. Most requests for products and brands occur at home, although a large percentage of requests made by younger children are made while shopping with mom. Overall, requests for cereals and snack foods remains relatively constant for all age groups, while request frequency for other products, such as toys, clothes, and sports equipment, varies with age (Isler, Popper, Ward 1987).

TV viewing time. Weekday afternoon television viewing does not vary significantly by age. But during weekday evening viewing periods, eleven and twelve year olds watch significantly more TV than eight, nine, and ten year olds. During Saturday morning viewing, eight and nine year olds watch significantly more television
than ten, eleven, and twelve year olds. A child's grades in school do not appear to be related to the amount of TV viewing which is taking place on Saturday mornings, weekday afternoons, or weekday evenings (Wiman, Newman 1989).

The 1990s.

*Income tied to purchase.* Children from low income families purchased a greater number of cereals than families with upper middle income children. English speaking children also purchased a significantly greater number of children's cereals than did French speaking children (Goldberg 1990).

A summary of the findings regarding the behavioral component of attitude is presented in Table 3. Note that children tend to choose products they have seen advertised. TV advertising is the main influence on toy and game choices and a single commercial can increase a child's motivation to obtain the advertised product. Children request products sold by TV characters they like. Younger children make more requests for products than do older children and both middle and upper class parents selectively choose which product requests to fulfill. White children selected the advertised product more often than black children. Attention was somewhat closer during the end of commercials.

<table>
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<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Summary of the Behavioral Component of Attitude</th>
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| Influence of TV ads on choices | • **Food Choices:**  
- Children tend to choose products they have seen advertised  
- Young children choose the advertised product when the commercial shows it in a favorable light and reject the product when it is shown in an unfavorable light  
- Commercials containing premium offers for breakfast cereals are superior over other types at influencing product selection  
• **Toy and Game Choices:**  
- TV advertising is a dominant influence on toy and game choices  
- Increases in toy and game choices occur over peak advertising periods, before the Christmas holiday  
• **Number of Exposures:**  
- A single commercial can increase a child's motivation to obtain the advertised product  
- Increasing the number of exposures to a commercial has a positive effect on children's preferences and behavior, but does not guarantee they will choose the advertised product  |
| Children's requests | • Children request products sold by TV characters they like |
Requests for products are often made while shopping or at home
• Children who talk with their parents about TV advertising make more purchase requests than those who do not
• Most frequently used request strategy is “just asking”
• Most children’s requests are granted
• Young children make more requests for products than older children

Income tied to purchase
• Middle and upper class parents selectively choose what requests to fulfill
• Low-income families purchase a greater number of cereals than upper-middle income families
• Upper-class parents are more likely to buy competition games and toys

Black and white children
• White children selected the advertised product more often than black children
• Similar response patterns were found between black and white children when asked about a commercial, a character, or the brand in it

TV viewing time
• Weekday afternoon TV viewing does not vary by age
• Older children watch more TV on weekday evenings than younger children
• Younger children watch more TV on Saturday mornings than older children

Other
• Informal communication between children about advertised products creates needs for those not exposed to the ads in an indirect manner
• Young children attend somewhat closer to the end of commercials
• Commercials for toys could increase a child’s motivation to obtain the toy and influence time spent playing with toys, as opposed to playing with peers

RECOMMENDATIONS

LIMITATIONS

As with any research study, there are certain limitations. One of these is related to journal selection. Six often cited marketing journals were chosen to represent the literature regarding children and advertising. These six journals are a fairly small representative sample. Articles based on commercials limited to children’s food products and toys were the focus of this study. Food products and toys are shown in the majority of children’s commercials.

The theory used in this content analysis is one with a three part view of attitude – cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Using another theory of attitude, such as the Fishbein Model (Fishbein 1963), belief-importance model (Boyd, Ray, Strong 1972), or theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, Ajzen 1975) may produce different results. The
subcategories listed under each component were chosen to help classify information across the decades. Popular topics within each component were chosen as subcategories. These subcategories were chosen by the author as logical groupings of the findings.

Another limitation is related to the characteristics of the sample groups chosen in the articles. There is an under-representation of minority groups. Only three of the articles looked at black children and compared them to white children, while no other minority group was mentioned. Black children watch significantly more TV than other households, almost 50% more (Advertising Age 1980). Hispanic-Americans watch 30% above the average time spent on television viewing across the U.S. (Santoro 1991). So there seems to be an over-representation of white children and an under-representation of minority groups in the samples, which may skew the results.

FUTURE RESEARCH

After performing this content analysis, a few areas were found that could aid in future research. The same articles, or ones very similar, could be analyzed using a different theory of attitude, such as those cited earlier. This would provide more insight and another view on children’s attitudes toward television advertising. Comparing another theory to the three part attitude theory could reinforce similar results and/or point out differences. In any future research on children, there needs to be an increase in the representation of minority groups. Samples chosen should reflect the proportion of minority groups in the total population. Different minority groups may produce varied results and hold different attitudes toward television advertising, which could skew results. The strong TV viewing statistics stated earlier, regarding Black and Hispanic-American children, provide a strong argument for the inclusion of these groups in future studies. Samples should be of sufficient size and appropriate character to ensure a representative view of children’s reactions to TV commercials. More or different product classes could be looked at to see if children’s attitude toward TV advertising differs by product class. More products are advertised on television today than ever, and this should be reflected in future studies.
Little research has been done in the 1990s on children’s viewing habits. With new technological advancements being developed everyday, and the advent of the Internet, time once spent viewing television is being replaced with time devoted to computers and video games. The impact of new technology on children’s viewing habits has yet to be explored. Another topic of interest is the increasing buying power of children and how that power relates to television advertising. Children are learning now at younger ages the value of money and what it means to be a consumer. Recall in the introduction the amount of spending power children have, in part because there has been an increase in the amount of money parents are giving their children. The influence of TV commercials on how children choose to spend their money is an area worthy of investigation.

MARKETING ACTIONS

Marketers who engage in television advertising are now targeting kids directly. Children have become a market segment of their own and advertisers are beginning to take advantage of this. The once popular notion of targeting parents to purchase children’s food products and toys has practically disappeared. Kids are the primary influence on food and toy purchases and are increasingly making many of these purchases on their own. This is directly related to their increase in spending power and the busy lifestyles of families. As mentioned in the introduction, children account for $8.9 billion in spending annually (Pollack 1999). This is a significant amount of money and presents increased opportunities for marketers of children’s products.

In order to keep up with videogame-savvy kids of today, food marketers are introducing “interactive” foods in colors, shapes and flavors that magically metamorphosize into another (Pollack 1999). “Interactive” has become the buzzword of the 1990s with the growth of the Internet. Kids must continually interact and be involved with a product in order to spark and keep their interest. This new category of products leads the way for intensive product development, as well as creative marketing strategies to make children aware of these interactive products.
The need for creativity has increased because of intense competition and the large number of product classes available. Advertisements need to show products being used in realistic situations. In the portions of commercials where the product is being used and enjoyed, children pay closer attention (Rust, Watkins 1975). Examples of positive and socially acceptable behavior should be shown in commercials because of the strong tendency for children to imitate the actions of likeable characters. At age three, children will imitate a character on television as readily as they would someone in real life (Josephson 1996). Humor, entertainment, and music are key elements to consider in the execution of ads because they attract children (Ward 1972).

Television networks have a responsibility to run socially acceptable advertisements, especially those targeted toward children. The common theme found in this content analysis was that commercials do affect children and is often how they learn of products and make choices. Public Service Announcements are a popular way for networks to show they are socially responsible and care about our children. Recall when assessing a child's nutritional awareness, public service announcements were very affective in influencing children to choose the more nutritional food product (Goldberg, Gorn, Gibson 1978). Networks should continue to run PSA's that promote education and healthy lifestyles, because for a lot of children TV is a more dominant influence than family or friends.
REFERENCES


