

EXPOSURE OF TV ADVERTISEMENTS ON MALAY CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND RESPONDS

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Abstract

This study examines the exposure of television advertisements to children. Two variables have been used to measure the exposure; attitudes and responds. Relationships between television exposure and gender were also been examined. Structured questionnaire was developed based on previous literatures and a total of 50 pre- school children were employed in this study. Findings disclosed that there is a positive relationship exists between exposure on television advertisements and its impact on children's attitudes and responds towards the advertisements.

Keywords: exposure, television advertisements, children, gender

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, television has been helping parents where it has been used as a baby-sitter when their parents are busy with house chores. Through this, indirectly children are exposed to television advertisements. Ever since James McNeal had recognized children as important asset in purchasing a product or service, advertisers have been developing strategies to target their product or service to children.

Although Internet is developing as a new medium in approaching children, television is still recognized as the predominant way to reach children (Thomas & Dillenbeck, 2002). This could be due to its nature in reaching children direct to their homes and limited control over the advertisements (Gunter, Oates & Blades, 2005).

Critical findings by Gantz, Schwartz, Angelini, and Rideout (2007) estimated that children between two- and seven-years-old see were exposed to 14,000 television advertisements per year while children ages eight- to 12-years-old see more than 30,000 per year.

Berger (2008) stated that television advertisements are seen as minidramas that employ all the strategies and techniques used in theatre and cinema. This is due to the use of verbal and non-verbal that makes the messages get across the audience. Moreover, the advertisers add the power of human voice plus strong narratives, music, sound effects and superb writing and that is why television commercials are such an incredible means of persuasion.

Advertisers commonly use television as the medium due to its popularity and ability to reach various audiences of all ages (Hsu, Yang and Su, 2007). Fast food advertisement brings a significant impact on how children see, act and respond to advertisement. Exposure of television plays an important role in how children act in their daily lives. With the exposure of television advertisements, children attitude and response toward certain products or services will vary depending on advertisements genre.

Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the television advertisements exposure to Malay children. Moreover, in order to make comparisons, gender of children is also explored. Therefore, the following research questions are to be answered:

RQ1: How are male and female children's attitudes towards television advertisements?

RQ2: How are male and female children differ in responding to television advertisements?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Children and Television Advertisement

Many studies have proved on the association of television advertisements with obesity among children. Koplan, Liverman and Kraak (2005) stated that children tend to be obese due to prolong exposure to advertisements which may affect their health especially eating and exercise habits. In U.K, Lewis and Hill (1998) found that most of the advertisements aimed at children are on food. A second on cereals, a third on sweets and snacks and the rest were fast food and these foods are categorized as less unhealthy food. Young's (2003) research is incoherence with Dalmeny, Hanna and Lobstein as he said most of television advertisements aimed at children are food products.

Barcus (1980) found that more than 80% of advertisements targeted at children featured toys, cereal, candy, or fast food restaurants. In addition, Moore and Lutz (2000) conducted interpretive study on 38 children on their perceptions toward advertised products and results show that children actively engaged with advertisements whereby they looked out for their favourite advertisements that can bring enjoyment and entertainment to them.

Food, drinks, toys and mobile phones are found to be children's preferred advertisements as they found to be interesting and funny (Chan, 2000). The use of cartoon figures and favourite television personalities has added to children's liking for a product.

Nature of advertised products is another factor that should be taken into consideration when it comes to children's likes or dislikes of an advertisement especially food advertisements (Scammon & Christopher, 1981). As example, Chan (2000) in his study in Hong Kong found that children preferred food, drink, toys and mobile phones advertisements. The reason mentioned by children on why they prefer these types of advertisements was due to interesting and funny.

When it comes to food advertisements, advertisers include emotional appeals, mood alteration and fantasy appeals to attract children. Emotional appeals are believed to add children's difficulty in processing disclaimers. While mood alteration appeals are used to create positive feelings of the product (Barcus, 1980). Fun or happiness has been found to be the most frequent emotional appeal used in television advertisements for food products. Folta et al. (2006) and Warren et al. (2008) mentioned that 50% of food advertisements have this appeal. Interestingly, advertisers seldom showed food but instead depicting children having fun eating the food. In order to develop long-term memory of the product, emotion appeal is attached with the food brands.

2.2 How advertisements affect children

In 2004, Kunkel et. al classifies children's advertising literacy as follows; up to the age of four years, advertisements are mainly entertainment to them. From six to seven years, children believe advertisements do provide information. At the age of seven to eight years, children still unable to differentiate between information and advertisers intention to persuade. By ages from ten to twelve years, children are able to know advertising motives and aim but unable to explain sales techniques. From this study, it suggests that children are easily influenced below twelve years old.

According to Harper (2006), when looking at the relationship between children and television advertisements, it can be divided into two aspects. The first is on the positive influence of television advertisements and the second is on the negative influence of television advertisements on children. Kennedy (2000) noted that children are spending four hours of their waking hours either to watch television, playing computers or playing video games while 40% of family's time is spend by watching television.

Lawlor (2009) expresses his concern on how well children are able to discern, interpret and cope with television advertisements. Brucks, Armstrong and Goldberg (1988) added that due to lack of cognitive defence of children toward television advertisements, advertisements may have strong effect on children. Frequent exposure to television advertisements might influence children attitudes (Goldberg, 1990).

For decades, issue on the influence of advertisements toward children has been raised. In 1976, Burr and Burr reported that parents in US had strong doubts about the honesty of advertising to children. In relation to the fact that television advertisements may mislead the children, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2000) stated that television advertisements as manipulative, arousing desires which is not important, making children materialistic and creating a tension between parent- child relationships especially to low income parents.

Bijmolt, Claassen and Brus (1998) added that parents' main concern over this issue is due to vulnerability of children and their lack of cognitive understanding of television advertisements. They are also not mature enough to make decisions to choose what is good or bad. In terms of behavioural effect of television advertisements, children watch television is due to requests for advertised products (Valkenburg, 2000). Young (2003) explained "pester power" or "nag factor" as a negative effect of television advertisements to children. As example, Preston (2005) noted that one-third of children use "nagging driven to ask their parents to purchase food and beverages.

Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson (1978) found that exposure to television advertisements to children aged five and six years old have directly influence their breakfast food and snack preferences.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A structured survey was designed with 13 items that examined issues of children attitude and respond towards television advertisements. We arrived at this questionnaire using past research employing questionnaire for television advertisements exposure on children (Spielvogel & Terlutter, 2013; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2000).

Two pre- school classes that accommodate 50 Malay children were selected. All children were age six years old. Headmistress of the school was approached to seek for permission before conducting the study. Letters written by researchers were sent to the parents through class teachers. The letter contained and outlined the purposes of the study and requested consent from parent and child to contribute to the study.

Study was conducted in one of the classrooms that coincide with children's everyday routine (Angell & Angell, 2013) as this is advisable to ensure the children are comfortable with the setting.

Descriptive statistics and t- test of SPSS were used to analyze the data.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Demographic

The results show that there are 50 respondents involved in this research. The demographic information of the respondents is explained in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Demographic Information of Sample (N=50)

Items	Information	n	%
Gender	Male	22	44
	Female	28	56
Age started pre- school	4	10	20
	5	19	38
	6	21	42

Independent T- test was conducted to compare exposure of fast food television advertisements scores for male and female children. Out of the 13 items, six items were related to attitudes and seven items were on response. The results are explained in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3.

4.2 TV advertisements and attitude

Based on Table 4.2, the data indicates that the children's attitude in the area of watching television before going to school ($t=2.618$, $p= .000$) is significantly different for both genders. When the mean scores are compared, it is found that both genders have equal attitude towards television advertisements.

Table 4.2
Difference of attitude between genders

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Watch TV after school	Male	22	4.05	2.19	.972	.207
	Female	28	4.61	1.89		
Watch TV before school	Male	22	2.41	2.50	2.618	.000
	Female	28	.82	1.79		
Like TV ads	Male	22	1.09	.294	.552	.267
	Female	28	1.14	.356		
Watch TV on weekdays	Male	22	3.55	1.63	1.13	.342
	Female	28	3.04	1.55		
Watch TV on Saturday	Male	22	2.91	1.11	.52	.858
	Female	28	2.89	1.10		
Watch TV on Sunday	Male	22	2.91	1.11	.175	.818
	Female	28	2.96	1.11		

4.3 TV advertisements and responds

Table 4.3 shows the result of children's respond toward television advertisements. The result illustrates the children respond in the areas of knowing television advertisements ($t=1.52$, $p=.015$) and remember catch phrases ($t=2.06$, $p=.000$) are significantly different for both genders. When the mean scores are compared, female children are more responsive towards television advertisements.

Table 4.3
Difference of responds between genders

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Know TV advertisement	Male	22	1.55	.510	1.52	.015
	Female	28	1.75	.441		
Frequency watching TV	Male	22	2.14	.774	1.07	.660
	Female	28	2.36	.678		
Most remembered ads	Male	22	2.59	1.37	.912	.373
	Female	28	2.25	1.27		
Favourite ads	Male	22	2.55	1.41	.253	.361
	Female	28	2.64	1.31		
Less favourite ads	Male	22	2.50	.913	2.56	.664
	Female	28	3.18	.945		
Remember catch phrases	Male	22	1.86	.351	2.06	.000
	Female	28	2.00	.000		
Attraction to watch ads	Male	22	3.18	.958	.630	.850
	Female	28	3.00	1.05		

5.0 DISCUSSION

This study explores how children perceive television advertisement, with special attention to their attitudes and responds towards television advertisement. There is a lack of research particularly on relationship of television advertisements and gender. Most of previous literatures touched on the exposure of television advertisements and children in general.

Frequent exposure to television advertisements might influence children attitudes (Goldberg, 1990). In terms of children attitude toward television advertisements, Folta et al (2006) and Warren et al (2008) mentioned in their research that 50% of food advertisements contain emotional appeal. The result of this study is similar whereby the children like to watch television advertisements particularly fast food advertisements due to emotional appeal contains in the advertisements.

The results obtained in this study were similar to previous studies. The findings suggest that television advertisements is very popular among these children as they indicate their keen interest in its entertainment features, such as music and humour, irrespective of whether the message is specifically targeted at them or other audiences. This shows that children perceive television advertisements as a source of entertainment.

At the age of six years old, children regard advertisement as an entertainment. This would confirm what Kunkel et. al (2004) suggested that children below twelve years old are easily influenced and advertisements are mainly entertainment to them. This research found children actively enjoy television advertisement. It entertains them and is part of the pleasure they derive from watching television. It is also part of a shared culture with family and friends.

Television pumps in lot of fast food and snack advertisements. More time spent with television viewing will result into buying the brand illustrated in the advertisements. As Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson (1978) found that television advertisements to children have directly influence

their breakfast food and snack preferences. As far as fast food advertisement is concerned, children are influenced more by television advertisements than by other medium of advertising.

Brucks, Armstrong and Goldberg (1988) stated that children have lack of cognitive defence toward television advertisements; hence advertisements may have strong effect on children. In relation to the study, the children know what advertisements are. However, due to limited cognitive ability, they are unable to remember advertisements catch phrases.

Most of the children in the study are attracted to watch television advertisements and most remembered advertisements are fast food advertisements. This result is similar to most of previous studies and it could be due to advertisements that are aimed at children are mostly on food (Lewis & Hill, 1988)

Other than food advertisements, the children also like to watch other genre of television advertisements such as formula milk powder. As validated by Chan (2000) who found that food, drinks, toys and mobile phones are found to be children preferred advertisements as they found to be interesting and funny with the use of cartoon figures and favourite television personalities.

In terms of relationship of gender and exposure of television advertisements, female children are found to have more attitudes and respond towards television advertisements compared to male children. However, male children like watching television and remembered most television advertisements more than female children.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the exposure of television advertisements and its impact on children's attitudes and response. This study has revealed a positive relationship exists between exposure of television advertisements and its impact on children's attitudes and responds towards television

advertisements. For better understanding on the situation, further research has to be undertaken to come up with more positive measures to reduce the adverse impact on children.

To conclude, majority of children knew what advertising is and has developed an appreciation of television commercials. Understanding of television advertisements, recall of slogans and advertisement contents were related to the development of children. Advertisers targeting at children should make commercials funny and interesting so that children will like them and remember their brands.

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