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Full Length Research Paper

Children and advertising literacy: A study of selected schools in Lagos, Nigeria

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The purpose of this paper is to examine how children understand advertising messages and to identify those critical impacts of such messages. Six focus group discussion sessions comprising 10 members per group were conducted between 10-13 years studying in schools located in Lagos Metropolis. Samples of schools were drawn purposively whereas the respondents were selected through simple random method. Data were analyzed by using descriptive method. It was found that children between the ages of 10 and 12 years are able to understand the intent of the advertiser and differentiate between the imaginary world and the world of reality portrayed in the advertisements they attend to. The study concludes that the level of media and information literacy (MIL) among children are high, which necessitates the need for MIL education, among children.

Keywords: Advertising, Literacy, Children, Media.

INTRODUCTION

The use of traditional story tellers as custodians of collective tradition, entertainment sources and trade promotion are well documented in many African societies. With the advent of writing more than 5,000 years ago, the concept of literacy shifted from the community story teller to the elite that were able to read and write. Writing literacy had progressed from the cuneiform writing to advanced forms that rely on symbols to exchange meaning. In that era, it was the person that was able to read and write that was regarded as the literate member of the society. The twin invention of paper by the Chinese and the first printing press by Gutenberg revolutionarized writing and reading literacy. Other landmark media technological developments were the invention of the Radio, Telephone, Television, Film,

Computer and the Internet that have radically altered the concept of media literacy in the present global era.

Review of the Literature

This study addresses media and information literacy from the point of view of advertising literacy among children in selected secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria. Media literacy is the ability to effectively and efficiently access, analyze, evaluate, create, comprehend and utilize messages across a variety of contexts (Baran, 2004). It has to do with the ability to bring critical thinking and problem-solving skills to bear on all media— from music videos and Web environments to product placement in films and virtual displays on NHL hockey boards. Media literacy is one of the essential capacities that enable people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media. Media literacy also

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enables individuals to become skillful creators and users of information and media messages. Other associated concepts of media literacy are advertising literacy, Internet literacy, computer literacy, film literacy, visual literacy and the like. It's about asking pertinent questions about what is there, and noticing what is not there. Media literacy is a repertoire of competences that enable people to analyze, evaluate and create messages in a wide variety of media modes genres, and forms.

Shapiro and Hughes (1996) defined information literacy as a new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural and philosophical context and impact. Prensky (2001) uses the term 'digital native' to describe the individuals, who have been brought up in a digital world and the internet has been a pervasive element of young people's home lives. The American Library Association's (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy states that "to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information".

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) demands our inputs as both producers and consumers of information in the media and through the media for the overall benefit of the society. It brings benefits to different segments of the society and serves as "a route to enhancing the public's appreciation of, and ability to contribute creatively to the best that the cultural and audio- visual arts have to offer. The focus is on pleasure and interpretation, creativity and diversity, originality and quality"(Shapiro and Hughes, 1996).

Advertising uses and gratifications (U and G) informs, educates, entertains, creates brand preferences and stimulates purchases. But prospects should have the ability to access, understand, correctly interpret and utilize advertising information to induce consumer buying decisions. (Ritson and Elliott, 1995). From this perspective, the ability to access an advertisement is not limited to its content, but also the ability to facilitate and demonstrate that understanding by using those meanings within the social context of existence. Advertising literacy can be described as the ability of the target audience or consumers to understand interpret and utilise advertising messages. Consumers are able to react to advertising messages based on their understanding of such message and they will purchase product based on their conviction.

Children may not have been sufficiently equipped with the life skills for accessing and interpreting advertising messages the same way the adults do (Baran, 2004). The average child sees more than 30, 000 television commercials and magazine advertisements a year; ads increasingly appear even on school material. (Consumer Union, 2000). Critics (Bartsch and London, 2000; Baran, 2004) contend that children are simply not intellectually

capable of interpreting the intent of these ads, nor are they able before the age of 7 or 8 years to rationally judge the worth of the advertising claims. Children in age group 8 to 10 years possess an elementary understanding of the advertising purpose (Bartsch and London, 2000). And, when the children are between age group of 8 to 12 years, they develop the ability to recall and make valuable use of the information stored in their memory, although this skill is not formed entirely until now, but evidence of the effectiveness of these attempts to lower the total influence of television advertising on the child is somewhat mixed, but most studies find effects of parental concerns (Adler *et al.*, 2004).

Moreover, it is contended that advertising enhances obsession with materialism since it arouses desires for wants rather than needs; it proliferates the beliefs that the commodities a person possesses are the most important things of life; and that attributes like beauty, achievement, prominence and happiness can be acquired only by material possessions (Bartsch and London, 2000; Baran, 2004). Consequently, children conceive material goods and money as important ingredients for happiness and social progress as compared to intellectual or spiritual life. Several authors suggest that advertising stimulates materialistic values in children (Wulfemeyer and Mueller, 2007; Greenberg and Brand, 1993).

In addition to media advertising, peer group, friends, parents and direct experience also play considerable roles in purchase decisions of children, along with the socio-economic status, cultural background and levels of education of their parents (Galst and White, 2005). Research (Pediatrics, 2006) shows that children younger than eight years are cognitively and psychologically defenseless against advertising. They do not understand the notion of intent to sell and frequently accept advertising claims at face value. In the late 1970s, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) held hearings, reviewed the existing research and came to the conclusion that it was unfair and deceptive to advertise to children younger than 6years. What kept FTC from banning such advertisements was that it was thought to be impractical to implement such ban. Though, some western countries have done exactly that: Sweden and Norway forbid all advertising directed at children younger than 12 years, Greece banned toy advertising until after 10pm; Denmark and Belgium severely restricts advertising aimed children (Pediatrics, 2006).

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) identified five concepts that should be understood in relation to media literacy (http://www.medialit.org/bp_mlk.html). They include: the principle of non-transparency; codes and convenience; audience decoding; content and message; and motivation. The first principle states that all media are constructed. This according to Keller and Share (2005, p. 374) means that "Media do not present reality like transparent windows or simple reflections of the world because media messages are created, shaped,

and positioned through a construction process. This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality". Advertising literacy here would demand a great sensitivity to digging down to the intended meaning of messages, since all media messages are constructed and may obscure reality, as it were.

The second concept associated with media literacy is referred to as that of codes and conventions, which means that media messages are constructed using a creative language (or signs) with their set of rules. In other words, media literacy relies heavily on semiotics-functionality of signs and symbols. This in itself implies the duality of meaning of signs, namely the denotative meaning (signifier, or content); and the connotative meaning, or the signified, or the subjective aspect of a sign based on ideological or cultural interpretations. Quoting Fiske (1990), Keller and Share (2005, p. 374) conclude that one of the goals of cultivating media literacy is to "help students distinguish between connotation and denotation; signifier and signified".

The third basic concept of media literacy, the principle of decoding, is that different people experience and interpret the same media message differently. This draws from the selectivity theory of the media, particularly theory of selective perception. Perception is in itself a by-product of the individual's knowledge, experiences and cultural differences. This brings to mind the debate regarding standardisation or localisation of advertising messages. A standardised advertising message may therefore not be uniformly understood across different societies of the world, as might a localized message in any particular culture.

The fourth related concept is that of content and message. Generally, media have embedded values and points of view. Media contents are often value laden, or are not entirely value free. Keller and Share (2005, p. 376) put it clearly thus: Media "content is often highly symbolic and thus requires a wide variety of theoretical approaches to grasp the multidimensional social, political, moral, sometimes philosophical meanings of a cultural text". Accordingly, media literacy demands that one should constantly be on the look out for the hidden philosophies, values, ideologies and mores that media messages try to sell.

The fifth and final relevant concept is that concept of media motivation. Simply put, this concept states that media are organised to either gain profit or power, or both. This demands that students to "consider the question of why the message was sent and where it came from". Keller and Share (2005, p. 376). This is all the more important when we limit our discussion to advertising literacy. The goal of every advertising message is to sell- a product, service, idea, cause, political party, religion or what have you. The advertisement in question should be informative, educative, or entertaining, but the goal is to invite

patronage. "Too often students believe that the role of the media is simply to entertain or inform, with little knowledge of the economic structure that supports it". Keller and Share (2005, p. 376). To what extent are children aware of the selling motives of the advertiser? This paper will address this all important question.

Theoretical Framework

Children's attention towards advertisements is highly dependent on several factors, namely that it must be simple, and must contain something new for children. As children start viewing television from early childhood and are intended to try what is advertised, then it becomes difficult to explain to them that primarily they should eat for the necessary nutrients not for just pleasure. Children analyze different advertisements according to their mental ability that differ from child to child. In addition, children's comprehension of advertising messages is dependent on factors like their ability and skill to make a distinction between commercial from non-commercial content and they must be disbelieving towards the persuasive intent of advertising within the limitation of their knowledge. This process of assessing TV commercials is known as cognitive growth and intellectual development (John, 1999).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development is a stage theory which postulates that all human beings move through an orderly predictable series of changes. After several years of observation in children, Piaget came to the conclusion that cognitive development has four stages and each builds on the previous one. He was more interested in finding out how the brain functions in processing in-coming information and understanding such information. These four stages proposed by Piaget are the Sensori-motor Period (birth to 18- 24 months); preoperational period (2-7years); the Concrete Operational Period (7- 11years); and the formal operational period (over 11years). In advertising, not all children are able to understand advertising messages uniformly but they make references to product advertised. They often pressurize their parents and guardians to buy such products for them.

Piaget's thinking about the child's cognitive development is based on four kinds of operations. They are assimilation and accommodation, conservation, and reversibility. The first two are closely related, Piaget's stance is that the child develops units of knowledge about the world, called schemata. As the child takes on new information about the environment, that information is assimilated into his or her consciousness and the thinking and behaviour are changed to reflect those new perceptions. In assimilation, the person adapts the environment to his or her own use, though that is limited by ability to consolidate the new experiences with previous experience. Accommodation, the reverse of

assimilation, occurs when the individual modifies existing thought structures so as to incorporate the new experiences.

Progressively over these stages, children develop a range of faculties relevant to advertising, including the ability to: distinguish advertising from programme content; recall and becoming aware of advertising; recognise and understand persuasive intent of advertising; like and become skeptical of advertising; and becoming defensive as far as advertising intent is concerned.

In a study, Valkenburg (2000), relied on the Piaget's theory of cognitive development to show convincingly how children of different ages understand media content. He notes that by about age three (3), children see not only life, but also, "a potpourri of colors, music, movement, faces, and repetition." (p.1). He notes further that by age five(5), children are not able to distinguish television fantasy from reality, "nor do they understand that advertising is persuasive rather than informational, though they are already sensitive to gender cues in television content." (p.1). However, when a child reaches, age 7 to 8, he tends to find the realism of the news more frightening than cartoons. In fact, at this stage, children begin to recognise the persuasive intent of advertisements and after age 8, children become generally competent in "putting the narrative together" Valkenburg (2000, p.2). In addition to this, children after age 8 become more critical of media content and begin to make more subtle comparisons between the world of television and reality. This increases in sophistication between ages 10 and 11 during which time children are able to draw on their own social knowledge to judge the realism of television content. This development peaks at age twelve where the child begins to show awareness of biases and stereotypes; make aesthetic judgments and become more aware of the purpose of advertising and branding, and may become skeptical of advertisements.

Learning theories are relevant in child development and cognition, as it is believed that human behaviour involves the interaction of people. Human beings think, reason, imagine, plan and interpret information. Ivan Pavlov's Classical conditioning posits that animals learn about the association between one stimulus and another that is, an unconditional stimulus elicits an unconditional response. (in the case of the dog) experiment conducted by Ivan Pavlov. Classical conditioning can involve many responses other than salivation including fear. As learning progresses, i.e. the animal experiences more and more pairings of conditioned stimulus and unconditioned stimulus.

A child learns about his/her environment through attitudes associated with it. The typical procedure for inducing this theory involves pairing an unknown brand, things, words, and music repeatedly together with some other stimulus that you know already automatically elicits positive feelings or emotions. Consistently, advertising a

product on exciting may result in the product itself generating an excitement response. Pairing a popular music together with the products in advertisements to generate positive feelings and liking towards the products.

Classical conditioning in advertising is referred to as a type of learning in which a stimulus acquires the capacity to evoke a response that was originally evoked by another stimulus. It is a very effective tool for advertising and is used in many different forms of advertising. Gewirtz (1969) defines social learning as a category of learning involving stimuli provided by people. There are two basic social learning processes that influence behaviour: direct instrumental_training where a teacher explicitly attempts to shape responses via differential reinforcement, and imitation, where an observer matches responses to discriminative cues provided by responses of a model. The latter process occurs without direct tuition and comprises the vast majority of a child's socialization.

Bandura's (1963) social learning theory posits that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. Learning theories encompass attention, memory, and motivation. People learn through observing and modeling others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. "Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." (Bandura, 1963). Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences.

A child learns from what she sees and the responses she associates with such observation. Children are quick to imitate things in their environment. Therefore, their level of reasoning and understanding is determined by those things they are able to pick up from their observations. An advertisement, properly executed, gets attention of the audience, arouses their interest in the product, elicits desire in them, convinces them on the need to have the product and stimulates an action whereby they purchase the product. This study seeks to investigate uses and gratifications of TV commercials among children bearing in mind the level of Media and Information Literacy (MIL).

Empirical Review

Advertising to children presents different challenges, as they are not sophisticated consumers. Their conceptions of self, time and money are immature. As a result, they know very little about their desires, needs and preferences or how to use economic resources rationally to satisfy them. And the nature of children's conceptual ability makes it likely that child-oriented advertising can

lead to false beliefs of highly improbable product expectations. While most children and parents are still joint consumers, more and more children are becoming sole decision makers. (Arens, 2006).

In other to promote responsible children's advertising and to respond to public concerns, the Council of Better Business Bureau (CBBB) established the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) provides a general advisory service for advertisers and agencies and also offers informational material for children, parents and educators. CARU's guidelines for advertising to children under the age of 12 year says that advertisers should always take into account the level of knowledge, sophistication and maturity of the audience to which their message is primarily directed. Younger children have a limited capacity for evaluating the credibility of information they receive. They may also lack the ability to understand the nature of the information they provide. Advertisers, therefore have special responsibility to protect children from their own susceptibilities.

Similarly, in Nigeria, the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) Code of Advertising (2010) states that advertisements shall not induce children to unduly pressurise their parents, guardian, other adults or any person whatsoever to purchase the advertised product. It further explains that appeals in advertisements directed at children must not make them feel inferior to or less likeable than other children who buy or use the advertised product, no exaggeration of the use of a product or situation shall be depicted in any advertisement directed at children. Olatunji (2010), in a related study found that children in Nigeria are exposed to various advertising media varying from television, radio, billboard, newspapers among others that tend to influence their preference for foreign foods. He shows that children older than eight years are able to read, understand make use of advertising messages in other to make purchase decisions.

Atkin (1976) explains that the nature of the portrayal of product consumption and consequences in commercial messages has significant implications for child modeling of advertising stimuli. A number of content dimensions relating to social learning theory were described in an analysis of all 470 commercials aired on the three television networks on two comparable Saturday mornings in 1972 and 1973. In general, these advertisements portrayed one or more models in the act of consuming a food or toy product and enjoying positive reinforcement as a consequence of this response.

Children engage in a continuous process of learning about themselves and their world. As they mature, that world expands from their home and parents to siblings to peers and, eventually, to people and places they know about. The advertising sector deliberately tones down the influence and possible adverse influence of the product they are advertising. They tend to portray an innocent aspect of daily life in their commercials and hope that this

innocent aspect of life would not only attract the attention of potential customers but would also influence them (Adler et al., 2004). Today, due to easy access to fast food products, excessive advertisement through a lot of media vehicles, the frequent promotion of these sorts of foods through television, Internet and other media, the lack of secure play grounds, and video games add to obesity among children (Ludwig et al., 2002).

On the average, a child observes 12,000 violent acts or advertisements on television per year, including many acts related to murder and kidnapping. There are almost more than 1000 studies, which validate that exposure to heavy viewing of television violence programmes increase aggression, hostile and destructive behaviour particularly in boys (Johnson et al., 2002).

In a recent focus group research with 50 UK children aged seven to 11 found that children believe the primary role of advertising is to inform and that advertising uses persuasion or pressure primarily to compensate for inferior product (Duff, 2004). Children also believed that humour and surprise resolution of problems in commercials contributed to their enjoyment. Despite this level of understanding, children themselves thought television advertisements influenced their knowledge of, and demand for, advertised products.

Wilhelm's (2000, p. 4) statement "that technology has everything to do with literacy. And being able to use the latest electronic technologies has everything to do with being literate" was supported by a 2005 wired world phase II (YCWW11) Survey conducted by the media awareness Network of Canada on 5000 Grade 4-11 Students. The key findings of the Survey are: About 62% of Grade 4 students prefer the internet, 38% of Grade 4 students choose the library. Also, 91% of Grade ii Students prefer the internet. 9% of Grade ii students prefer library. The implications of the foregoing studies on advertising literacy among children in Nigeria are discussed in this paper.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This is a qualitative research design; hence, it is a descriptive research. Two instruments were employed for this study, namely: descriptive content analysis and focus group discussion. In order to assess children's understanding of advertising messages, we conducted focus group discussion sessions in six selected school in Lagos Metropolis, whereas the researchers personally carried out a content analysis of the selected commercials.

A video compact disc presentation of three television commercials was exposed to the subjects and the researcher described the content bearing in mind the research questions. The cues that the researchers sought through the descriptive content analysis were derived from an earlier instrument used by Moore et al

(2000) in a study on “Flashpoint: An Innovative Media Literacy Intervention for High Risk Adolescents”. The adopted content coding instrument assessed advertisements based on the following criteria: who created this message and why are they sending it?; what techniques were used to attract and hold attention?; what lifestyle values and points of view are represented in this message? what are omitted from this message and why were they left out?; how might different people interpret this message? 6. Does the message approximate to reality?

The second instrument was the focus group discussion. A discussion guide was designed by the researchers, based on the research questions. Three commercials were selected and exposed to subjects. The selected commercials are Cowbell Chocolate Milk; Ribena Apple drink; and Three Crown milk. These brands are essentially products in the foods and drinks categories. Reasons for selecting them ranged from the fact that the brands were positioned at children; children were the dominant models; and the commercials contain comic appeals found to be of great interests to children.

Children served as subjects of the research. We limited our subjects to children in their first year in secondary educational level in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. The age of the selected subjects ranged between 10 and 12, the latter end of childhood age classification. This age was selected based on what the literature reveals, namely that such age group would have become intellectually matured to be critical of advertising content. For the purpose of this study, the formal operational stage was adopted because it is at this stage the cognitive level of children at age of -11 and above are able to understand and interpret messages properly. The students were in grade 7 (Basic 7). The rationale is that the subjects are educated enough to understand the commercials in terms of knowledge and message intent.

Each group of 10 members consisted 5 boys and 5 girls in the six schools selected. Participants (60 in all) for the focus group discussion were selected using the techniques of simple random sampling. The class register was obtained from the class teacher, and the names of all male students and female students were written on a list. The selection of class was done through the balloting techniques as the five arms of JSS1 were written in a paper and the arm of class was selected using a simple random sampling.

To select 5 males that participated in the focus group discussion, the odd numbers were randomly selected and subsequently, every other odd number until the desired figure was obtained. While for the female participants, the even numbers were randomly selected and every other even number was selected until the desired number was obtained.

Participants were drawn from both public and private schools. Students from private schools pay high school fees, whereas those of public schools are either highly

subsidised or sometimes enjoy free education at government or tax payers expense. These set of private school students therefore tend to enjoy higher socio economic status than their counterparts from public schools.

Six schools were purposively selected for the study, namely: International school Lagos (Private); Akoka Junior High, (Public) Lagos; and Obele Community Junior High School, Lagos (Public). There were also Elimshire College, Lagos (Private); Ansar-ud-deen Grammar School (Muslim Boys); and Lagos Anglican Girls Grammar School (Christian Girls). Three of the schools were drawn from Surulere Local Government of Lagos State, and the balance was chosen from Lagos Mainland Local Government Area. The schools were selected because they were within easy reach of the researchers.

The story line of the commercial was first explained to the subjects. Based on the focus group discussion guide, the commercials were exposed to the subjects repeatedly. Focus group discussion sessions addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do children understand the functions of advertisements?
2. To what extent do children understand the commercial intent of the advertiser?
3. What are the influences of socio-demographic factors on children’s perception of advertisers’ intent?
4. To what extent do children understand the ideological and value orientation of advertisements?
5. To what extent are children able to distinguish between the make – believe world and the world of reality in commercial?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brief Description of the Commercials

The commercials exposed to subjects are **Cowbell Chocolate Milk**,; **Ribena Apple** drink; and **Three Crown milk**. The **Cowbell Chocolate Milk** commercials contained several attractive elements for children (e.g. adventure, music and drama). Also, it is an adventurous advertisement, portraying a 10-12 year old boy drinking cowbell milk after which he started to imagine that he was on an adventure around the world, riding a bicycle along with the mascot of the product. The kid model was seen globetrotting, visiting cities and landmarks around the world.

A similar scene and storyline was observable in **Ribena Apple** drink, where children (also age 10-12) are seen returning from a cycling exercise to their mother who gave them a new **Ribena Apple** flavour. They were quick to believe that their mom would fulfill her promise. In Three Crown milk television commercial (TVC) is seen a family preparing a beautiful costume (a velvet and crown)

for their child's role performance at a stage drama. The boy performed the role of a king in a fairy tale story and won the hand of a princess in marriage, as it were

RQ1: To what extent do children understand the functions of advertisements?

Children were able to define the concept of advertising as the act of informing people about a product so that they buy it. They also explained that advertising inform them about a product and it also educates them about the usefulness of the product. Taking the Three Crowns advertisement as an example, they explained that the advertisement they watched during the focus group discussion, gave them information that the product contains about 28 vitamins and minerals for a child's physical development. This shows that children understand that advertising messages are provide selling information, among others.

RQ2: To what extent do children understand the commercial intent of the advertiser?

From the focus group discussion in the schools, the researchers found out that children know that every advertisement is aimed at convincing people to make purchases. The subjects were able to explain that the advertisement is persuading them to buy the product. More so, they tell their parents to buy such product for them since they don't have the absolute purchasing power to buy.

RQ3: What are the influences of socio-demographic factors on children's perception of advertisers' intent?

Children from the various schools selected for focus group discussion do not really have different perception of the advertisement they watched. This means that their socio demographic status did not play a significant role in their level of cognition towards advertising messages. Thus, during the focus group discussion sessions, a seemingly uniform level of knowledge on the commercial and persuasive intents of advertisements was exhibited by the children who were drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds.

RQ4: To what extent do children understand the ideological and value orientation of advertisements?

Subjects were able to acknowledge the fact that role playing in the family is key in children's life. The Mother was the more prominent in all the three advertisements

than the father as she was seen taking care of the family most especially the children. Also in the case of the *Three Crown Milk* the principal kid male actor performed the role of a king and a hero, whose heroism won him the hand of a kid princess in marriage. The children studied were thus able to identify a major criticism against the advertising institution, that it reinforces stereotypes in gender roles in society.

RQ5: To what extent are children able to distinguish between the make – believe world and the world of reality in commercial?

Children were able to differentiate between the world of reality and the imaginary world as they were able to come to a conclusion that much of the scenes in the commercials cannot happen in real life situations. They also concluded that these stunts displayed in the advertisements they watched were mere manipulations of computer graphics as well as camera effects.

This study replicates and extends findings previously published in the literature. We found that the child's age has a substantial positive effect on the child's understanding of advertising messages. In this paper, we assessed children's understanding of advertising messages, as manifested in their ability to recognise advertisements and their comprehend the selling intent of commercials. Children were able to define the term advertising and interpret the messages in a typical advertisement. Their cognitive level proves that they can differentiate between the imaginary world and the world of reality.

Children's understanding of advertising can be classified into their ability to recognise information in the advertisements, and their ability to comprehend the selling intent of advertising. To some extent, these two components are related in a hierarchical manner, as comprehension of the selling intent of advertising implies that one is aware of a certain difference.

In support of Piaget's theory of cognitive development that the formal operations of child development, that children between 11-15 years are capable of formal logic, exchange of ideas, comprehending view point of others, understanding social relationships which require human interaction. At this stage, no longer bound by concrete problems; have the ability to deal with abstractions; and were able to consider abstract concepts. The focus group discussion was able to find out that children between that age group can process information and understand the message intent of the advertiser.

Limitations

This study was essentially an exploratory one, and basically qualitative in design. Sample size was limited

and data could not be subjected to any level of quantitative analysis. Also, the selections of schools were not done through the probability sampling but nevertheless that does not invalidate the findings of this study. The adopted method enabled the researchers to personally interact with the subjects and probe into the level of advertising literacy among children. Thus, the findings of this study are relevant as they demonstrate the extent to which children have acquired accurate knowledge and skills in media and information literacy. The areas of gap only suggest the need to replicate the study on a higher scale by future researchers.

Implications for Media Education

In traditional Sub-Saharan Africa, children more seen than heard. A precocious child was often met with sanctions, if not reprisals. Access of children to objects perceived to be meant for the adult were denied. It was with this kind of sociological baggage the Africans were heralded into western form of civilisation with the result that many parents today still believe that children's access to the media and to information should be curtailed. For instance, the perception that children should not have anything to do with sex education has led many parents preventing children from information and communication on sexuality through the media. Yet, studies have shown that children access information through the media on sex and related issues and even engage in early sex, some having their first sexual relationship at age nine (9) or less (Olatunji, 2007). It will therefore be dangerous to have children who may be deficient in media and information literacy.

Moreover, children are inundated daily with media messages which may range from extremely beneficial to being extremely harmful. Media educators need to counsel parents to constantly guide their children or wards as they become increasingly exposed to the media. The goal of responsible advertising is to create in children disciplined purchase habits. This calls for increased training and knowledge in advertising and information literacy so that children will begin to make informed purchase decisions from childhood to the adult life.

African children should become more involved in media message design and dissemination. Children and youths need to be exposed to critical thinking and problem-solving orientation through MIL. Mass communication curricula need to equip students with MIL skills through which they may be able to approach the media especially advertising critically. Families should discuss television advertisements with their children, bearing in mind their educational, religious, cultural and moral values. MIL should be incorporated in schools' curricula beginning from early childhood education. Advertisers should contribute to this parent-child relationship in a

constructive manner through self regulated advertising, while advertising messages should continuously focus the best in our diverse traditions, culture, ethics and other cherished values.

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