

Effects of Advertising Appeals on Children Choice of Infant Food Products in Calabar

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Abstract:

This paper has the objectives to determine the effects of advertising on children choice of infant food products, the awareness of mothers as major purchasers of infant food products on the effects of advertising appeals on infants in their demands and requests for infant food products, the implications of children exposure to advertising messages and the extent of efforts in bringing about positive influences on the children in the interests of advertisers and consumers. A survey design was used. The sample size was 104 pupils registered both public and private schools in Calabar municipal and south council in Calabar Cross River State. The results were very revealing as there were significant effects of advertising appeal on children ($p < 0.05$), mothers were aware or not ignorant of advertising appeal on their children ($p < 0.05$), children remember advertising messages faster and better than their subject lessons taught them at school, children do not know the dangers of consuming excess confectionaries ($p > 0.05$) and there were reasons to believe that advertisers would adhere to the standard of good messages by placing warning information on the dangers of excess consumption of infant food products

Key words: *Infant food, advertising media and promotion*

1. Introduction

Over the years marketers have concentrated their marketing activities on the adults. This situation is fast changing to the markets for children with massive advertising messages targeted at children as consumers. There have been remarkable increases in the advertising of infant food products, amidst some controversies on the vulnerability of the children to the exposure to wrong messages of advertising, excessive consumption of products, health problems and conflicts between parents and children over purchase decisions.

Aaker et al., (1998:677) argue that children do not know or have difficulty balancing appeals of highly sugared products with long health risks-by age two, about one half of children have diseased gums and decayed teeth. The homes and schools have become market places for advertisers and there have been growing concern on the abuses of such practices against child learning and privacy. Belch et al., (2001: 743,764) concur using rewards as baits and argue further by citing Peggy (1999:22-26) and Sale (1999:46-51) that "kids are bombarded with commercial messages outside of school. The risk is that they will be treated increasingly as consumers in one institution where they are supposed to be treated as learners.

The advertisers are also by their messages involving children more in decisions on purchases without their knowledge of the implications in such character formations. Solomon (2001:370) citing O'Neill (1998) argues that children are playing a big role in the array of readymade meals, from pasta to nutrition bars now offered in supermarkets. Although mothers still make most grocery decisions, foods advertisings in magazines aimed at young people have increased, and food companies are building "edutainment" web pages in addition to game sites. For example Ragus "delizioso" site, eat.com, promotes its cheese creations! Pasta sauce to kids by offering quick, sample recipes, a Go mama Go! Video game with tips on how to gracefully slurp spaghetti during a dinner date, these are advertisers' tricks on children.

The media of advertising has become more sophisticated in message appeals especially with the internet and television which are considered most visible and used media in children advertising. The newspapers and out of home media are also used regularly to convey message appeals, but there are reasons to believe that the dangers posed to children on negative influences may be reduced or minimal.

The concern of parents and government are that children have problems in differentiating between true and false advertisement claims, commercials and programming, the selling intent of advertisings, the safety of the

products such as toys and the health danger of sugared foods. Advertising appeals are considered deceitful and misrepresentation of opinions in children.

The advertisers are negative and aggressive in their sales drive to children with great consequences on the social lives of these children. The parents and other consumers are worried about the health problems of their children arising from bad habits and social ills in the consumption of sweetened food products, which advertising appeals have encouraged through various promotions.

The various media have not adequately responded positively to the legal limit of advertising to children and without measures to control the content of messages. This study attempts at investigating the extent of influences of inter media advertising appeal on infant food products. The approach covered an abstract, the introduction, the theoretical framework and the different media of advertising. There was also the controversies and impact of advertising appeal on children, regulatory mechanisms and control of the media for the protection of children and the conclusions.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This study had the following objectives to determine the:

- (i) effects of advertising appeals on children choice of infant food products

1.2 Hypotheses

This study formulated the following hypotheses:

- (i) there is no significant effects of advertising appeals on children in the choice of infant food products in Calabar.

2. Theoretical framework

Piaget theory was propounded by Jean Piaget in 1969, Piaget believed children's schemes, or logical mental structures, change with age and are initially action-based (sensory- motor) and later move to a mental (operational) level (Priscoll, 1994). Furthermore, Piaget believed that the cognitive performance in children is directly associated with cognitive development. Children in the pre-operational stage (age 2 to 6/7), would not successfully be able to master tasks of a concrete operational stage (ages 6/7 to 11/12 child). The insight of Piaget Jean on children maturation was very revealing that children cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do so (ages 2-7 years and 7-11 years). Piaget approach deals with "cognitive constructivism". The importance of the theory was used to explain children's development of brand symbolism understanding, the most relevant stages of Piaget theory are the preoperational and concrete operational stages. John (1999) review of research investigating children's brand symbolism concludes that because advanced processing skills and perspective taking abilities emerge during the concrete operational stage, children aged 7 to 11 years are better equipped to understand complex brand information. This study has the implication for critically assessing the packaging and promotional planning targeted between these ages. The theory underpins the research interest based on the supporting evidence that children have a leverage of understanding advertisement messages targeted to them, which may as well influence their interests towards the different types of foods for children by prevailing on their dependent to purchase what they like. The understanding of the product message (appeal) guides them to purchase when they are given monies to spend, (UNICEF information sheet on nutrition, UNICEF NIGERIA, June, 2006.)

2.1 Conceptual framework

Marketers have to be socially responsible and adaptive to the social marketing and societal marketing concepts in consideration for the wellbeing of consumers and society Advertising as an aspect of marketing communication has been used for deceptive marketing practices in promotions, by overstating product features, or performances, running rigged or predetermined contests and not reciprocally educating consumers on the danger inherent in the consumption of products.

Kotler et al., (1999:45) Berkowitz et al., (2000:22), Etzel et al., (2001:15) argue that marketers should be conscious of societal marketing concept and provide for society's' well-being. Marketers have not been socially responsible for the fear that consumers will not be willing to pay the premium and this may inhibit their ability to face competitive challenges.

This study has been based on the framework of social responsibilities of marketers in using the influences of inter media advertising appeal to children and conscious of their safety in the consumption and use of products. Ward (1980:380), Perachio (1992: 425), Macklin (1994:154) suggest that consumer socialization is the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitude relevant to their functioning in the market place, The two main sources for primary socialization are the family and the media. The influences of inter media advertising appeal on infant foods are discussed within the social and societal marketing concepts with the advertisers having the social responsibilities on the social lives of the children.

2.2 The media of advertising

The full evaluation of the influences of inter media advertising can be considered in the characteristics of media frequency, reach, continuity and dominance, Wright et al (1978:585) suggest that reach is related to coverage with people exposed to the messages over a given period. In the context of advertising to children, reach could be very concentrated and successful because children are occupied with more than 6-8 hours of television viewing in a 12 hour broadcast. The daily advertisings in the television can be rightly claimed to get the full attention of the children.

Frequency accounts for the number of times the members of the target audience are exposed to an advertising message. Continuity attempts to evaluate timing of the advertisement while dominance involves the superiority of advertising to all others within a given medium.

The various media of advertising have different appeals on infants or children, with the television, radio and internet having the greatest influences when compared to the print and out of home media. Ryder (1994:256) suggests that television commercials are often dense in presentation that viewers have trouble retaining the messages. Television has the highest appeal with the advantages of visual, audio, motion, colour and the cable network linkage or connectivity that makes it an instant choice medium worldwide.

The advertisement of food products such as beverages, cereals, confectionaries are best demonstrated on television than any other medium of advertising. The use of children to demonstrate the flavours and presentation increases the appeal. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and other independent private television carries more advertisements on infant food products such as "Milo the food drink of future champions" "biscuits of different types" "Tom-Tom" from Cadbury Nigeria limited and a host of other products with strong appeal messages.

Etzel et al (2001:548), Belch et al (2001:701), Berkowitz et al (2000:526) argue that the television has the greatest appeal and influences on children, because of the numerous attractions contained in the programme and the leisure time for watching or viewing the advertisements under a relaxed atmosphere and environment. Belch et al (2001:763) argue that the children constitute the only market segment whose members are held as a captive audience for six hours a day watching television.

The internet is also becoming very influential on children advertising because most children now spend a lot of time on the internet, to read newspapers and other information placements on the web. Sports, education and other entertainment programmes are most attractive and have high appeal among the children audience. The radio is the dominant medium and most popular in Nigeria with deep penetration in rural areas, and has high influences on children or infant in food advertising .The African setting makes it difficult for most children to have access to television because of the high level of poverty or poor standard of living of most parents.

Television is urban based but highest populations of infants are rural based, thus making the use of television advertising unattractive for rural areas. The few homes with television are always without light due to incessant power outages, which reduces the viewing time to less than 15 minutes in a 24 hour broadcast time. The radio is the best medium of advertising to the rural population of consumers with high birth rate and having high demand of infant food products. The radio is suitable in all occasions and could be listened to in many ways in cars, boats, beach, gyms, homes, at leisure hours, office hours, in the farms, at work

underground and all other places with the advantage of battery power source. The stations are very many and can be tuned alternatively with ease.

The radio has various types of appeals such as use of music and entertainment, riddles and jokes, plays and fun time, children half hour and other education programmes especially sports broadcasting. There are favourite days such as Saturdays or weekends with parents and children sharing opinions on advertisements on infant foods and making choices and decisions on product and purchases respectively. Hawkins et al (2001:217) argue that reaching children used to mean advertising on Saturday morning cartoons. There are many programmes that can be used to reach children and which are directed at children. The print media could be considered the most popular but least used for children advertising and in particular with limited appeal on infant food products. The print media has the problem of being read by adults and as such lack the patronage of children who could motivate their parents to buy the advertised infant foods in the papers. The magazines and journals have colour prints but are read by a few who may not have the need for infant food products.

The out of home media of advertising has greater appeal influences on children for infant food products, than the print media but less than the electronic media. The number of consumers that can sight the billboard advertisements could be very high and it has the advantages for pictorial expositions of the various types of food product. The billboard has the appearances that demonstrates some actions on uses of the infant foods and could serve as extraordinary attractions to consumers and the children folks. The sites located within the urban cities are particularly attractive with colour production, electronic compatibility including lighting, sound, motion and other attractions. The confectionary foods and cereals are particularly very attractive on billboards with pictorial sketches of children at play, going to school, in class rooms and at different positions and locations of activities. These have high appeal on the children and their parents.

Advertisers have been involved in the use of various media to directly reach the children with advertising messages. Bovee et al (1992:172) suggest that advertisers have gone beyond television to specialised kids Magazines, direct mail and now even classroom, consumer adults worry that kids are being exploited and that impressionable youngsters are being manipulated by unscrupulous advertisers. Hawkins et al (2001:217) suggest on line services, direct mail and kids club as most accessible sources.

The compatibility of the various media of advertising has made flexibility possible in creating different appeals. The television advertises what the newspapers are carrying on their pages and the radio is echoing the same messages of similar appeals, all these with the peculiarity of equipment, appearances of pictorial sketches, sound applications and mix or combination of characters.

2.3 Effects of advertising appeal on children

The composition of children market demonstrates the nature of influences that the media has on the children particularly the appeal of advertising messages on infant food products. Me Neal (1998: 737-741) suggest that children make up three distinct markets, there is the primary market where kids spend a lot on their own wants and needs, and 1/3 (one third) of money earned goes to food and beverages with the balance spent on toys, appeal, movies and games. The influence market is that where parental yielding occurs when a parent decision maker is influenced by a child's request and "surrenders" (Palan and Wilkes (1997:159-69).

The future market is where kids have a way of growing up to be adults (eventually) and savvy marketers try to look in brand loyalty at an early age. The markets classifications show that advertisers would direct different advertising appeals to the consumers in the form of mixed identifies of strictly children, children and parents and children and other consumers.

The concern over advertising to children is based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development which Hawkins et al., (2001:212-213, 713) refer that children lack the ability to fully process and understand information (including marketing messages) until around 12 years of age. The periods are sensorimotor intelligence (0-2yrs) doesn't think conceptually; preoperational thoughts (3-7 years) development of languages; the period of concrete operations (8-11 years) ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems; and the period of formal operations (12-15 years) able to apply logic to all classes of problems.

The controversies over the impact of advertising appeal on children has been a major focus of public policy and concern among advertisers,, parents, other consumers and government. The advertisers have gone beyond the traditional media to target the children at school classrooms and public recreational grounds. Belch et al (20001:764) citing Faber (1999:26) and Sale (1999:51) argue that kids are bombarded with commercial messages outside of school and the risk is that they are treated as consumers in the one institute where they are supposed to be learners.

Marketers such as Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola have penetrated schools with their exclusive beverages contracts after paying the schools some large sums of money for exclusive vending rights. The fears of consumers concern the vulnerability of children to wrong effects of advertising., Hawkins et al (2001:217) suggest that marketing activities particularly advertising produce desirable values in children, results in appropriate diets, and cause unhealthy levels of family conflict.

There are further suggestions such as Assael (1998:102), Armstrong et al (1998:93-113) that children advertising teaches materialism, impulsiveness and immediate gratification, as a result, it creates poor consumption values, fostering impulsive choices, as in expensive or unneeded toys, sugared cereals and junk food. The influences of inter media advertising appeal on infant foods products are real as research has revealed that children who are exposed to advertised food products, such as highly sugared cereals and candy commercials prefer them to more nutritious products. Gold Berg et al (1997:69-75, 1982:200-205, 1978:22-29) argue that such children picked significantly more candy over fruits as snacks. Aaker (1998:690) suggests that an area that stirred much attention and marketing practices is the use of health claims -food advertising.

2.4 Forms of Advertising Appeals

The use of various forms of advertising appeals to reach children and parents have been observed including fear, emotional, humor, fantasy among others that are quite creative and scintillating and capable of leading anyone to take action toward the object of advertisement.

2.5 Regulatory controls for the protection of children

The protection of children from the savvy advertisers' wild appeals has been a major concern to government, voluntary agencies and parents. Hite et al (1987:40-53) suggest that various consumers' groups have also urge the media, particularly television broadcasters, as well as marketers to assume responsibility for the programmes and advertising and promotional messages they offer to children. There are further suggestions such as the inability of children to understand the purpose of commercial as fully as older people (Rubin 1974:409-419) Bahal986:382-393) and problems of advertisers seeking household information from kids, offering prizes, mixing advertising and non-advertising content in websites and using the name alcohol and beverages or juice rather than liquor. Hawkins et al (2001:713) argues on the fact that the overall marketing system particularly advertising is socializing children to value things (products) rather than intangibles such as relationship and integrity.

Belch et al., (2001:747) citing the Children Advertising Review Unit (CARU) note that CARU has voluntary guidelines concerning the use of premium offers which directed runoff conditions for offer must be clearly and mandatorily stated with disclosures of terms that can be understood by children audience. The product rather than the premium offer must be emphasised, and children programming be limited to 10.5 minutes an hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on week days.

The Federal Trade Commission Staff report cited by Belch et al (2001:774) recommend banning all television advertising for any product directed to or seen by audiences composed largely of children under age eight because they are too young to understand the selling intent of advertising. Enis et al (1980:19:25) suggest that parents should be involved in helping children interpret advertising and can refuse to purchase products they believe are undesirable for their children. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) has guidelines for advertising to children but nothing specifically was mentioned

on infant food products. The awareness or interest on the need for cautious advertising messages appeal on infant food products in Nigeria could be said to be very low or nonexistent.

2.6 Importance of infant food in Nigeria

According to UNICEF information sheet on nutrition, UNICEF NIGERIA, (2006), micronutrient deficiency is a direct cause of child morbidity and mortality in Nigeria. Micro nutrients such as Iron, Iodine, vitamin A, and others are necessary for the healthy development of children. Their absence in diet cause serious disorders. A healthy society really needed well -fortified infant food to complement the normal staple food consumed at homes. Vitamin A is a critical micronutrient for the development of children's immune and visual system. UNICEF may have created some awareness on need for parents to be careful with the types of food consumed by children.

To improve the nutritional status of school children, the federal government launched the Home-Grown school feeding and health programme in 2005 under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Education. Nutritional balance is of importance to the parents, government and international development partners like the UNICEF. Their importances to child's development have also been the concern of various manufacturers. The communication marketing strategies are diverse, the infant are target at home and schools with various appeals. Parents seemed to have appreciated this enlightenment campaign and are quick and eager to satisfy their children food requirements and may have also been concerned with the type of food consumed by the children and are therefore conscious on observing the UNICEF information on nutrition.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Shukla (2008) defined research design as the master plan, blue print and even as a sequence of research work tasks and activities. It is a plan of methods and procedures that is used by researcher to collect and analysis data needed by managers. The conclusive research was used to general findings of the study (Malhotra, 2004). The descriptive research was suitable to determine the extent or frequency of which an event will occur or the relationship two variables and will also be useful to describe characteristics of certain respondents. In adopting the descriptive design, the cross sectional design was used. This is because information was collected from the chosen sample of the population element ones by conducting a survey. Survey method is a set of structure questionnaire given to a respondent design to elicit specific information on the impact of advertising appeals on children and the purchase of infant foods.

3.2 Study area

The area of study was Calabar in Cross River State, it is an ancient town that has been Nigeria's first Capital in the pre-colonial days, it remain the headquarters of Cross River State; it is globally known for her Tourist heavens which earn her name" Tourist destination". The Efiks ethnic group is regarded as major "amongst other ethnic group.

3.3 Population of Study

The population of study comprised of parents who are currently using infant foods of various brand. The parents must have registered in any private or public nursery schools in Calabar metropolis.

3.4 Data collection

Survey respondents were asked to state their level of agreement of each statement for on the impact of advertising appeal on children and corresponding patronage on an interval scale of measurement (1 represent "strongly disagree" to 5 represent "strongly agree"; 3 denotes average). According to Cooper (2000), this type of scale is considered to be an interval scale. Therefore, measurement of central tendency and its dispersion can be made.

3.5 Sampling design/ sample size determination

A simple random sampling technique was used to sample respondents (parents of infant) in both Public and private nursery schools in Calabar Metropolis comprising Municipality and Calabar South. A sample size of One hundred respondents (104) was based on convenience sampling technique. This is because some parents

may not be literate enough to read the questionnaire when presented to them. The teacher helped in identifying choice respondents according to their level of enlightenment

3.6 Data analysis technique

Simple correlation analysis was used to analysis the hypotheses with aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

4 Result presentation

Table 4.1: Simple correlation analysis Result showing relationship between advertising appeals and infant choice of food.

		Advertising	Choice of infant food
Advertising	Pearson Correlation	1	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	104	104
Choice of infant food	Pearson Correlation	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	104	104

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The table above shows that the r – value of .40 and a p - value of .000 < .05. This result revealed that a significant relationship exist between infant food advertising appeal of various manufacturers and infant choice of food. The relationship is responsible for the increase in infant food advertising on bill boards in various nursery and primary schools in Calabar.

4.1 Discussion of findings

The result give credence to the fact that parents to a large extent submit to the choices of their children made as a result of advertising appeal targeted at them. This result shows a relationship with the study of Palan and Wilkes(1997:159-69) they emphasized on the effect of the influence market; where parental yielding occurs when a parent decision maker is influenced by a child's request and "surrenders" The resultant effect of such impact may tell on the child health if the parents are not careful enough to assess the nutritional value of such infant food according to the minimum acceptable standard by government regulatory agencies. ., Hawkins et al (2001:217) suggest that marketing activities particularly advertising produce desirable values in children, results in appropriate diets, and cause unhealthy levels of family conflict. There is a mix effect of the effect of advertising in the society. The government must try to create a balance between what is advertised for children consumption and their health safety. The result of the study show gives credence to a study conducted by Gold Berg et al (1997:69-75, 1982:200-205, 1978:22-29) argue that children advertising on infant foods make the picked significantly more candy over foods as snacks.

5.0 Conclusions

The influences of inter media advertising appeals on infant food products have not been felt in Nigeria as much as the developed countries of the world such as Europe and America. The awareness of the need for inter media advertising appeal on infant food product has been very low. The rate of advertising on infant food product has also been very low when compared with general commercial advertisement in the Nigerian media. The most advertised infant food products are positively done during the peak periods of promotions; the influences of which do not make much lasting impact on children, parents and other consumers.

6.0 Recommendations

Advertising is a potent communication that should be cautiously directed at children. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria should be pragmatic and proactive in vetting every advertisement directed at children to ensure that no aspects of it can cause children any mental hypnotism as they are not capable of determining the side effects of what is consumed. The mothers should be aware of the children interests and be able to link it with a particular source such that effects of advertising could be detected timely and be

discouraged. Advertisers should be compelled to include the side or contra effects of any infant food products reminiscent to what obtains in "cigarette smoking is dangerous to health" as displayed in every advertisement on cigarette smoking.

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