CHILD TELEVISION ADVERTISING: THE PERCEPTION, ATTITUDE AND OBSERVATIONS OF GHANAIAN PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

Much research on TV advertising toward children emphasize its negative impact on the child, while counter-views promote that such advertising is valuable as it provides other product information of use to the child. This study attempts to bridge this gap by exploring a much more localized and deep perspective of the influence of child advertising on parents in Ghana for consumer decision making purposes. The sample consists of 100 Ghanaian parents of 10 year old children who were purposely chosen from the higher income bracket residential areas of Tema and Accra. Respondents viewed three adverts randomly selected from a list of all child adverts aired on GTV in 2011. The results illuminated similarity in perception of both male and female parents towards acceptance of the adverts, as well as the product advertised, relative to congruence with socio-cultural values. This study brings forth precise knowledge of the decision behaviors for a select niche Ghanaian consumer demographic with high disposable income. It could wrongly be assumed that high income, educated consumers are more knowledgeable of the world beyond their village or region, and so more open to influences not of the Ghanaian culture. The value to this study is the refute of that assumption, and confirmation that traditional cultural values are keenly important to both male and female parents in this niche target related to consumption decisions. Of additional value is the study’s confirmation that these parents utilize effective communications in TV viewing practices (the Instructive Guidance and Restrictive Viewing as defined in Calvert, 2008) to teach culturally-compliant consumer decision making to their children. An extension of the research findings provide a foundation for the assertion that Ghanaian children are adequately educated in TV advertising content and intent, and they are able to decipher adverts from programs at age ten.

Key Words: Advertising, Children, Ghanaian culture, consumer decision making
INTRODUCTION

One of the prominent issues for discussion and research in Ghana today centers on the perceived harm that television advertising is likely to have on children (Appiah-Adjei, 2010; Allafrica.com, 2010.). The main charges against child adverts are that they cause unnecessary hedonism in children (Clay, 2000), increase pressure on parents (Flury and Veeck, 2009; Gbadamosi et al., 2012) and lead to the consumption of junk foods that result in obesity in children (Boyland et al., 2011; Hota et al., 2010; Andreyeva et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2011). Another argument holds that child adverts destroy the moral and socio-cultural fabric of children as well as violate children’s rights (Henaku, 2012; Lawlor and Prothero, 2002; Espejo and Miller, 2004) on the grounds that children, particularly young ones, are easily influenced and may assume what is shown on television is real. Counter views exist that child advertising is a useful tool for the economic and consumption socialization of children (Bush et al, 2009; Linebarger and Piotrowski, 2008). Others point to the unique and lucrative market niche that children present to marketers (Valkenburg, 2004). A finer argument in favor of child advertising holds that advertisers and marketers are parents themselves and, therefore, play it fair and safe. Opposition to this view includes Clay (2000) who holds fellow psychologists responsible for putting their professional knowledge at the disposal of marketing, the outcome of which harms the child.

Controversy also exists over the objectives for targeting children with adverts. Preston (2000) opines that the sole intent of advertising to children is persuasion for the increase of revenues and profits. Van Evra (1998) contests this position and believes that the sole purpose of advertising is to inform, with the choice to buy or not resting with the individual. However, it is important to note that the arguments of Van Evra (1998) are applicable to adults rather than children, as the psychological and emotional formation of the child remains in development until even age 20, presenting a lack of cognitive development with which to make decisions (Pechmann et al., 2005). A broader and more acceptable view to this research is presented by Blosser and Roberts (1985) who
believe that child advertising attempts to inform, teach, sell as well as provide an analytical framework for product and brand evaluation to the child. Lawlor and Prothero (2002) concur with this latter view and posit that the critical point to consider with respect to child advertising is whether the child is able to use the advert information in ways other than those intended by the advertiser.

Academic literature on child advertising in Ghana is scant. The most recent published research on the topic is that of Gbadamosi et al. (2012), which addresses how children in Africa relate with TV adverts. The study concluded that TV adverts depicting humor as well as comic characters are enjoyed by African children, while those with frightening presentations are not appreciated. Earlier research also concluded that African children compel their parents to buy advertised products for them (Gbadamosi, 2007), a phenomenon referred to as pester power (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011). However, these studies seem to have failed to address whether children in Africa actually use advertising stimuli for their own enjoyment or for critical personal decision making (apart from asking their parents to buy the products for them). Taking this further and within the framework of Piagetian theory of cognitive development, younger children can neither analyze advertising stimuli nor appreciate others’ views (Selman, 1980), both of which are critical components of decision making on any given advert stimulus. A more distant study by Donohoue et al. (1978) conducted in the United States, attempted to distinguish differences in how Caucasian and African American children relate to TV advertising using race as the differentiator. It was revealed that the African American child, born and raised in the USA, is quite different from the African child whose formation took place in Africa because of the social, cultural and economic climate in which that child was raised (Donohoue et al., 1980). The study, therefore, throws little or no light on the African perspective, other than to illuminate the need for research within the African culture rather than attempting to extrapolate from Western research for development of African marketing strategies.
This study attempts to bridge this gap by exploring a much more localized and deep perspective of child advertising and its use by children in Ghana for decision making purposes. Compared to the studies of Gbadamosi et al. (2012) and Gbadamosi (2007) that interviewed children directly, this study instead interviewed parents.

**Study objectives:**

Specifically, this study aimed to determine, through Ghanaian parents, how their ten year old children decipher adverts scripted in English. The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

What are Ghanaian parental attitudes towards adverts aimed at their 10 year old children? Does the female parent differ from the male counterpart in their opinion of these adverts?

What is the impact of Ghanaian socio-cultural values as an influence upon parental acceptance or rejection of both advert and product for their ten year old child?

The foundation of this study is based on the work of Lawlor and Prothero (2002) who believe that research concerning child advertising is skewed in favor of its negative impact upon the child. They argue that research with undue emphasis on the persuasive and selling intent of advertising and its effects on the child as a consumer paints child advertising in negative colors.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Television (TV) advertising is reputed to have the most profound effect on children (Schneider, 1987; Van Evra, 1998; Maher et al., 2006). These authors argue that these TV commercials receive the highest recall rates, a prerequisite for advertisement effectiveness. TV adverts are able to attract and maintain a child’s interest and attention longer than any other medium of child advertising. Child TV advertising in Ghana is pervasive, although opinions to the extent of this vary. Zimmeraman and Bell (2010), Hota et al. (2010) and Boyland et al. (2011) view it as less pervasive whereas Gbadamosi et al. (2012) reports that families in Africa may have TV sets in every child’s room and
children may watch TV anytime they desire. With the estimate of 64 percent of Africans living in rural areas (tradingeconomics.com, 2012), where these facilities and incomes are low, Gbadamosi et al. (2012)’s assertions may need further empirical investigation from parents in Ghana.

Debate for the banning of all adverts targeted at children in Ghana has been fierce (Allafrica.com, 2010) and has put the advertising industry at risk. The main points of contention are that some of the child adverts demonstrate or imply unethical behavior (Appiah-Adjei, 2010; Henaku, 2012) not acceptable in Ghanaian social and cultural values (taboos) with regard to sex, food and general behavior patterns.

**Nature of TV advertising targeted at children.**

As mentioned earlier, TV advertisements targeted at children are able to attract and retain the attention and interests of children for long periods (Maher et al., 2006) compared to other forms of child advertising. Such adverts are accordingly colorful and use tactics such as humor and fun (Blosser and Roberts, 1985; Collins, 1990), cartoon characters, celebrity endorsers, child models, animals and quick actions (Blosser and Roberts, 1985; Rolandelli, 1989; Rozendall et al., 2011). In the Ghanaian context, celebrity and child model advertising are more pronounced and commonplace. Perhaps the explanation for the choice of this style resonates with the desire to generate curiosity, likeability of the product and create aspiration effects in the children who watch the adverts (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003). It is acknowledged that some children not only enjoy the fun in the adverts (Gbadamosi et al., 2012; Collins, 1990; Lawlor, 2009) but, when they are able to make sense of the intent, aspire to be like the child models therein. More recent views (Warren, 2002; Dicks, 2011) consider man’s ability to interpret stimuli and ignore those options inconsistent with their needs and personality. Finally, much progress has been made in psychology and the neurosciences pertinent to the effects of advertising techniques upon children. Such techniques subtly engage children of all ages and effect implicit attitude change in a manner not engaging their
rational decision making (Nairn and Fine, 2008).

**Child TV adverts: Understanding the Intents.**

Two schools of thought attempt to explain what is meant by intent in child advertising. One believes that if children are able to interpret the persuasive intent of adverts, then they understand the intent (Macklin 1987; Bijmolt et al., 1998). This is the opinion of many other authors in the literature on child advertising--looking at intent from the advertiser’s perspective. Perhaps, it is important to differentiate selling/persuasive intent from coercive intent. An argument is developed that coercive intent differs from the persuasive intent by the degree of force, compulsion and or aggressiveness (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003). A minority opinion also exists in relation to the concept of understanding advertising intent with regard to children. This group believes that a child perspective of TV advertising is also possible and needs further study. For instance, Lannon and Cooper (1983) first suggested that TV advert intent can also be seen from the perspective of the child and in particular how useful adverts are to the child. The authors argue that the child’s viewpoints of advert intent may be unintended compared with the advertiser’s persuasive/selling intent (Puntoni et al., 2010) such as providing a form of entertainment and fun (Collins, 1990), education and training as part of the general consumer socialization process (Bush et al., 1999), provision of a convenient break in lengthy but interesting programs, education of the child about new products and their functional capabilities, etc. (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003).

**Parental perspectives as a reflection of child reactions to TV advertising:**

A fundamental question that this study aimed to address is whether children’s reactions and decision making in relation to TV advertising can be measured through parental perspectives. At age 10, the Ghanaian child lives with the parent(s) and is totally dependent on them for finance to buy products. He/she is ripe cognitively and socially to understand advert intent (Hota et al., 2010) and appreciate others’ views (Selman, 1980). Cultural norms and
expectations, as determined by reproach and approval methods from parents, are known to the child. The parent still has absolute power to mould the child according to the socio-cultural schema of the parents till the child reaches adulthood (Munroe and Munroe, 1972). As such, the views of the parent may significantly reflect the child’s views in relation to advert/product decision making (Feldman and Wolf, 1974).

Calvert (2008) throws light on three TV viewing scenarios which may have impact on whether parental views reflect the general views of the child on TV advertising. She proffers that the manner in which parents handle their child’s exposure to TV advertising is important in determining what values, convictions and attitudes children have as well as the similarity of these to parental ones. Co-viewing, she believes, creates the impression to the child that whatever is shown on TV is good and desirable, which can create a sharp divergence between child and parental views. She argues further that Instructive Guidance and Restrictive Viewing promotes similarity of parent/child perceptions. These views are readily acceptable to Moschis et al. (1986), Carlson et al. (1992) and Prasad et al. (1978). A more refined argument is provided by Carlson et al. (2011) who attempts to measure parental-child view similarity by using mother-child communication systems prevalent with regard to TV advertising. Their research concludes that mothers who take pains to watch TV adverts with children, explaining content and intent to children as done through Instructive Guidance as well as Restrictive TV viewing, share common values and attitudes with their children towards TV adverts. Carlson et al.’s (2011) findings seem to fit the description of generation X (born between 1960 and 1981) Ghanaian parents who desire to raise their children slightly differently from their (1946-1964 born) baby-boomer parents (Munroe and Munroe, 1972) while maintaining their fundamental cultural characteristics. Child adverts are normally screened from 7pm-8pm daily on GTV when parent(s) and child are at home as a nuclei family, making instructive guidance and restrictive TV viewing possible. This differs from past generations who would be gathered in the village square as a community to share Ananse stories,
Information about how 10 year olds react to TV adverts can then, perhaps, be significantly gleaned from parental responses if it is established that Ghanaian generation X parents practice Instructive Guidance and/or Restrictive TV Viewing with their children.

The discussion so far indicates that three factors exist if children and parents wish to make informed decisions about product and service choices. They must first understand the advert and its intent. They also need to subject the advert and products to their unique societal judgment system and, finally, decide if the advert as well as the product itself resonates with their cultural typology.

**Cognitive theory and understanding TV advertising intent**

Cognitive development theory developed by Piaget (1952) provides the structure often used to determine the ability of children to identify adverts from programs (Stephens & Stutts, 1982), understand them in terms of the language used (Dodonov and Dodonov, 2011; Rozendaal, Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2011) and to determine if the desired actions created by the advert correlate positively with the targeted child’s age. In cognitive terms, any advert and product choice (as well as reactions to such products and adverts) that a child makes at 10 years is, therefore, assumed to be the best and informed choice that has meaning to the child as a unique person.

The above theory is chosen to lead this research to uncover how the unique socio-cultural schema of the Ghanaian child helps him/her to relate to and make decisions about products and services advertised on GTV through the eyes of parents.

**METHODOLOGY**

The interpretative approach is reported to be best suited for human behavior research (O’Sullivan, 2005) especially when dealing with children (Gbadamosi et al, 2012). This study however adopts the positivist research paradigm as a way of measuring how parents react to adverts in relation to their culture which is fixed in the short run. **Ethical concerns.**

Child advert research predominately sources data from children and not parents. The benefit is that children,
who are the main protagonists, may offer better insights than parents, as unique individuals. However, children can misunderstand issues raised and offer irrelevant information. This research opts for interviewing parents. A purposive sample of 100 Ghanaian parents of 10 year old children were thoughtfully chosen from the higher income bracket residential areas of Tema and Accra for the exercise. Participating parents were located through word of the mouth in selected areas via door to door visits in the communities. A survey/questionnaire method was used because all selected parents are literate and could answer simple ranked questions. A pilot study involving five parents was conducted and from feedback obtained the questionnaire was revised to remove ambiguities. The participating parents were informed of their unconditional right of withdrawal and could seek clarification whenever required.

**Adverts selected and used in the research:**

Three adverts were randomly selected from a list of all child adverts aired on GTV in 2011.

**Advert 1** shows a very intelligent girl, in a family setting, winning a national spelling competition after some coaching from the mother, even in the kitchen. The mother publicly celebrates her award, and the little girl later presented her prize to her mother while the family was at dinner eating that particular advertised food (instant noodles). The food type can be eaten at home by child and other family members. It can also be chosen by the child alone for lunch at school.

**Advert 2** depicts an intelligent girl who desired to eat cereal with milk. She found an elder sister dating a young man in the family living room holding the brand of milk. She threatens the dating couple by attempting to call up their father, after which she is given the milk as a bribe not to do so. The dating thereafter turned sour when she sat between the daters to enjoy her favorite milk amidst her apparent joy of success at their expense. This food type is widely used in the home. The packaging, however, implies that it is targeted only at children to compete with old and established milk based brands that any child can buy with his/her pocket money during lunch break.
Advert 3 shows a young boy who has dirtied himself by playing in dirty drains, falling on the ground intentionally and racing with the family pet when returning from school. When reprimanded by the mother for his looks, he tells a lie that ‘It was not my fault’ but that a big animal (the house pet) chased him and he fell into a big river and also fell over a very high mountain. The mother believes and does not punish him, instead putting her trust in an antiseptic to clean out the dirt.

RESULTS

This Section presents a summary of the results of the study

Demographics of Respondents:
A total of 100 parents were contacted to participate in the survey. 96 parents comprising of 55.2% female and 44.8% male respondents successfully completed and returned the questionnaires. The Ghanaian culture affords mothers greater flexibility in work schedules than men, and women perform most of the family purchasing. As participating in surveys is usually delegated to the woman, all of these cultural factors influenced results. Respondents were literate, with the majority qualification being an undergraduate degree (54%). Those self employed constitute 41% and those in paid employment represent 58% of the sample. The commonest income range (42%) was GHC2001-GHC2500; 81.3% of the sample was married. Other demographic characteristics of the sample are detailed out in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Column N %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational achievement</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>51-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-university</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Self employed</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income levels</td>
<td>GHC 2,000</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GHC 2,001-2,500</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GHC 2,501-3,000</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GHC 3,001+</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey results, 2012-2013

Parental attitudes towards child adverts

Table 2 (a&b) attempts to ascertain parental TV advert viewing

Table 2a Parent attitudes towards Child Advert
Gender | Every child must have a TV in his room with open access | Parents must explain what TV adverts mean to children | Good child adverts are educative to children | I really feel bad about some child adverts
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Male | Mean | 1.77 | 3.95 | 3.93 | 3.84
 | Std. Deviation | .841 | .434 | .338 | .531
Female | Mean | 1.89 | 4.08 | 3.81 | 4.04
 | Std. Deviation | .751 | .432 | .441 | .587
Total | Mean | 1.83 | 4.02 | 3.86 | 3.95
 | Std. Deviation | .790 | .435 | .401 | .569

Three major issues emerge from Table 2a. These are:

- There is a general agreement from respondents of both sexes that good TV adverts are educative for children (mean 3.86). There is also strong agreement that some adverts are bad for children (mean 3.95). Results indicate the need for parents to explain the intent and meaning of adverts to children.

- The proposition that every child has a TV set in his/her room with open access (Gbadamosi et al. (2012) is, however, not acceptable to the majority of surveyed parents in Ghana (mean 1.83). Our results indicate that parents are not keen to allow their children to watch TV on their own and at leisure.

- The general consensus of these expressions across gender is demonstrated by Table 2b which shows that there is no significant difference (p=0.05) between the male and female parents in as far as the highlighted characteristics are concerned. For instance both the mother and the father have the same reservations about
children having a TV in their room and highlighted in the Table 2b (F 3.013 and sig 0.086).

Table 2b (ANOVA Table) : General Parental Attitudes Towards Child Adverts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every child must have a tv in his room with open access by gender</td>
<td>Between Groups (Combined)</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>58.995</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>59.333</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents must explain what tv adverts mean to children by gender</td>
<td>Between Groups (Combined)</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>1.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>17.605</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.958</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good child adverts are educative to children by gender</td>
<td>Between Groups (Combined)</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>2.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>14.904</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.240</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really feel bad about some child adverts by gender</td>
<td>Between Groups (Combined)</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>3.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>29.785</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.740</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Socio- Cultural clash’ Analysis of Adverts
We measure socio-cultural clash by the acceptance or rejection of the advert as worthy of recommendation by a parent for a child to watch and, perhaps aspire to. Table 3 shows the responses from parents on the three adverts chosen for this survey.

Table 3. Specific Parental Attitudes to Specific Child Adverts
The following are noteworthy:

- Advert 1 has robust means and fairly smaller standard deviation measures. Adverts 2 and 3 present opposite results.
- Advert 1 is generally more acceptable to parents in Ghana while 2 and 3 are not acceptable based on the relative means.
- More women like advert 1 more than their males counterparts and the likeability of women is more widespread than that of men.

On the contrary,

- More men dislike advert 2 and 3 than women.
- The dislike by men of adverts 2 and 3 is more widespread than those of women.

Table 4 shows the ANOVA results of this survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Adverts</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Advert 1 is good and I encourage my child to watch it</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I advise my child to behave like the child in advert 2</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>I like advert 3 and will encourage my child to behave like the child in the advert</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.370</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.275</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 (ANOVA Table: Acceptance of Adverts by Sex)
### From Table 4, the following are evident:

- The differences that exist between the sexes on the likeability (absence of socio-cultural clash) is immaterial. This is evidenced by the mean square value of 2.015, $F$ factor of 3.553 and a $p$ value = 0.063.
- Advert 2 and 3 show marked differences between the sexes. Advert 2 has a $p$ value = 0.000 and advert 3 has a $p$ value = 0.026 implying that there is significant differences between the parents on the adverts in question.

### DISCUSSION

**Parental/child TV Viewing and Perception Similarity**

- Advert 2 and 3 show marked differences between the sexes. Advert 2 has a $p$ value = 0.000 and advert 3 has a $p$ value = 0.026. The results of the study as evidenced in Tables 1b and 1c show that a majority of parents in Ghana are unwilling to let their children have limitless access to television and child adverts. A majority of parents spend time explaining the content and intent of adverts to their children. While these findings appear contrary to the assertions of Zimmeraman and Bell.
(2010) and to some extent, Gbadamosi et al. (2012), they resonate with the TV viewing practices described as Instructive Guidance and Restrictive Viewing (Calvert, 2008). For this to be the case, Carlson et al. (2011) argue that parent-child communication must be at its best - firm, open and friendly. Munroe and Munroe (1972)’s exposé on African parent-child communication as being, at best, authoritative may contradict the communication quality desired for parent-child opinion similarity if applied across board with regard to different generational cohorts. However, since the time of the Munroe and Munroe study, there is an apparent shift in parent-child communication style portrayed by Calvert as well as this research. Certainly, this also suggests a slight shift in socio-cultural values over the past four decades. Current parents under this study belong to generation X. They are more educated than their baby-boomer parents and have been affected more by ethnospace and mediascape (Appadurai, 1990) and lately, the internet. They now live in cities and in unitary and walled family homes. This contrast to the continuous villages of the 1970’s in which all residents shared basic facilities. It is, however, worthy to note that these people still maintain strong ties with their villages and people; they are not completely detached from their basic collectivist horizontal cultures (Levy and Hestroni, 2011). These remaining cultural influences render parents unlikely to leave off their children without strict control. This unique blend of factors produces a simile of the Carlson et al. (2011) communication in Ghana, especially among the elite and financially liberated. Theirs is a more child-centered communication system intended to ensure that parent and child perceptions about adverts are similar. Our first research objective that intended to determine whether parent and child perceptions about adverts can be similar as described by Calvert (2008) and Carlson et al. (2011) is, therefore, proved to be true in Ghana.

Socio-cultural Interpretation of Selected Adverts and Buying Behavior

It is important to understand the reaction of the sample to the adverts as follows:
Advert 1 portrays cues that resonate with the socio-cultural schema in Ghana. It is the norm for girls to help mothers in the kitchen and eventually take over household chores when feasible. Secondly, a great deal of emphasis is placed on scholarship among the generation Y in Ghana as an improvement on generation X because of the visible improvements that secular education for this older generation has provided in terms of social and economic wellbeing. Thirdly, it highlights mentorship/training by the mother in the art of being a woman in Ghana-cooking. Again it shows a happy family relationship desired in collectivist cultures as found in Africa. This family feeling and collectivist attitude to success are shown by the mother who celebrates the child publicly upon winning a spelling competition. The girl reciprocates and acknowledges the family as the winner of the prize.

Advert 2 conflicts with the collectivist horizontal culture in a number of ways. First, overt and open display of sex and sexual connotations are considered a taboo (Cui and Yang, 2012) in Ghanaian culture. Secondly, it is a taboo for a lady to date a boy in the father’s house. It is considered an insult to the father. Although Han and Shavitt (1994) and Cui et al. (2012) proposed that sexual appeals present instrumental incongruence that do not produce material socio-cultural clash capable of leading to rejection of advert and product, this study found it is not tenable in Ghanaian culture. Thirdly traditional Ghanaian culture, especially in Eweland, punishes blackmail severely. These infractions (clashes) on culture may explain the significant rejection of the advert by males (71%) as compared to (35%) by women as shown in Table 2b. The product advertised is totally rejected (100%) by men and only 15% of women are willing to buy the product as in Table 2c. Table 2b shows that more men (71%) dislike sexual exposure than blackmail. On this basis, it may be erroneously argued that women are more at ease with sexuality in adverts than blackmail. General and relatively low approval and purchase rates, however, indicate socio-cultural rejection because of incongruence, thus corroborating the work of Levy and Hestroni (2011) and Cui et al. (2012).
It is believed from the foregoing that our second research objective is true. Parents (and subsequently their children) in Ghana use adverts as inputs for decision making within the framework of their unique socio-cultural schema.

**Advert 3** shows dishonesty and lying which may be considered as an infraction on universal culture, even postmodernism culture (Solomon et al., 2009). Parental reaction to the advert is total rejection. This is understandable in the context that Ghanaian culture values honesty. However, the product, a liquid antiseptic, enjoys a near absolute and popular patronage and market share in Ghana, especially from females, thus presenting a dichotomy with respects to the socio-cultural congruency and social judgment theories. Two possible explanations exist as to why the congruency and social judgment theories still hold are as follows:

i). Petty lies are tolerated from children more that childhood sexuality and blackmail as a universal expectation of young children across cultures. This may mean postmodernism as a universal culture can accommodate petty lying from children. This possibly confirms the stand of Han and Shavitt (1994) and Cui et al. (2012) that some socio-cultural infractions (instrumental) may not bring about a clash sufficiently strong to necessitate patronage withdrawal.

ii). The advertised brand controls an almost total market share of the liquid antiseptic market in Ghana. Over the years, parents are accustomed to the use of this brand. A rejection of a poor advert of a trusted brand may not lead necessarily to product rejection.

**Open ended questions**

An attempt was made to summarize parents’ personal views on child adverts in general through three open ended questions. The results indicate that child adverts that encourage children to be studious, disciplined and aspire to greater heights for societal benefit are generally liked (65%). As such, adverts demonstrating roles that
benefit society (e.g. doctors, nurses, and teachers) are very much appreciated. This appears contrary to Gbadamosi et al. (2012) who purport that adverts showing frightening scenes such as giving injections are rejected by children. Perhaps this reflects the relatively younger sample used by the authors. Meanwhile, adverts that show appreciation are found to resonate well with parents. One mother described a tomato paste advert scripted ‘My mother is the best cook in the world’ as a good child advert because it teaches children to appreciate and celebrate motherhood and the innocent fun it generates. On the contrary, an obviously angry father wrote, ‘If all our marketers can teach our girl children is how to bring boys into their fathers’ homes and show near naked females on GTV, then our culture is dead’. Again, a middle-aged woman wrote about a car advert showing an indecently dressed (by Ghanaian standards) female, saying that anytime she hears the jingle of the advert she walks away from the TV and admonishes her 10 year daughter never to ‘copy that corrupt girl’s way of life’. However adverts that generate genuine humor (25%) are also appreciated. Alternatively, those that teach juvenile sexuality and other pervasiveness (85%), cheating and lying (10%) are despised.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parent/child advert perception similarity

The main finding in this research is the high likelihood that parental perceptions and decisions in relation to adverts and products seen in adverts by their children are alike among the parents surveyed.

This research also shows that Ghanaian parents are not naïve about the influence of TV adverts on their children. They do make sense of what adverts mean, what advertisers desire their children to do (persuasive intent) etc. The overwhelming acceptance of parents to teach their children what adverts mean imply that a good number of children are quite educated about adverts. This phenomenon satisfies the advert perception-similarity theory advanced by Carlson et al. (2011). Therefore, at 10 years, Ghanaian children are capable of
identifying adverts from programs, understand intent and treat adverts according to the socio-cultural schema in accordance with parental guidance.

The capability of Ghanaian children to interpret adverts is not limited to the understanding of its persuasive/selling intent. They are capable of enjoying ‘good adverts’ that exhibit fun (Gbadamosi et al. 2012) as well as discontinuing attention towards adverts/products that are not ‘good’. Good adverts are defined as those that reinforce the collectivist horizontal socio-cultural schema such as family togetherness, appreciation and celebration of family members and elders, and (of later generations) academic achievement.

**Contributions to literature and shortcomings**

**a. Contributions.**

Calvert (2008)’s concepts of parental Instructive guidance and Restrictive TV viewing have been proved to exist in Ghana as revealed by the survey. This finding contradicts Zimmeraman and Bell (2010) and to some extent Gbadamosi et al. (2012) who posit that co-viewing is the predominant choice in postmodernism culture. An extension of the research findings provide a foundation for the assertion that Ghanaian children are adequately educated in TV advertising content and intent, and they are able to decipher adverts from programs at age 10. Secondly, it has proved that Ghanaian parents enjoy fun through socio-culturally supportive adverts (Gbadamosi et al. 2012), show dislike for adverts contradicting cultural values, and a rejection of culturally-incongruent adverts and products (Levy and Hestroni, 2011). A component of this argument is that Ghanaians consider sexual portrayals and blackmail in adverts as fundamentally incongruous to their culture, which is contrary to Han and Shavitt (1994) and Levy and Hestroni (2011) who think otherwise. Thus, another major contribution of this study, particularly for product positioning in national and global markets, has been the identifying of demographically-specific cultural idiosyncrasies within Ghana for effectively targeting communication planning. This, therefore, further extends the work of Levy and Hestroni
(2011). Purchasing habits and roles by gender have been shown in this research to be heavily skewed towards females. An important deduction implies that targeting in Ghana should consider the concerns of women more than men, contrary to trends in individualistic cultures in America and Europe, especially for food items and children’s specific needs.

b. Shortcomings:

a). This study samples the views of parents on the empirical conclusions of Carlson et al. (2011) that parental and child views on adverts can be similar under specific conditions. Even though these conditions are generally met by the sample for this research, there exists a chance of parent/child dissimilarity in opinions as happens in real life. The study may be improved substantially if child views are also sought, as in Gbadamosi et al. (2012)

b) Chosen sample frame represents an elite class of the Ghanaian generation X. The sample is highly educated with high-end income and social infrastructure, living outside of native traditional areas. This class is far removed from the average Ghanaian whose average official daily income is less than $2.00. They are the most affected by ‘ethnoscape’ and ‘mediascape’ (Appadurai, 1990) and as such slightly removed from the traditional Ghanaian socio-cultural values in the strictest sense. The findings and conclusions from this research may not benefit very much from extrapolation into the total Ghanaian market.

c). A sample size of 96 is too low for making any reasonable generalization. Repeat of this study with a larger sample may provide additional value to targeting communications.

d) Statistically significant differences exist in purchasing patterns by gender (Pvalue=0.0001). Research is warranted to determine if parent-child viewing habits differ from these results for households with only one parent, lacking influences of both father and mother.

Recommendations to Marketing Practice in Ghana

To marketing practice, it is recommended that marketing communication strategy incorporates the ability of children as young as 10 years to not only understand advert
intent but also as capable of interpreting same in ways other than that intended by the advertiser. Such children have sufficiently matured cognition to take a decision on their own and/or guided by their parents. It will be a fallacy to assume that communicating to children must incorporate fun or entertainment. Secondly, advertising to children needs very careful planning. Timing of adverts may need to coincide with parental time preferences for children to watch TV. Advert content need not appeal to children alone but to parents as well to receive the socio-cultural approval, support and provision of funds by the parent to finance purchase. Thirdly, marketing communication needs to target women more than males for children’s products. Mothers have been established by this research as the de facto purchasing managers for the family in line with socio-cultural practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

A major area of recommended future research is to determine empirically how similar, in the Ghanaian situation, parental perceptions about TV advertising are to those of the child so as to validate this research and the works of Calvert (2008) and Carlson et al. (2011). Repetition of this research is warranted amongst a greater sample of this same demographic as well as with television-viewing families from lower income and lesser educated populations, as latter represents the bulk of the Ghanaian population. It is also suggested that this research is duplicated with same adverts and procedures but with children as the main protagonists (Gbadamosi et al., 2012) to validate and or refute the conclusions of this research.

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