

Social Class Influence on Child's Perception of TV Advertisement Messages by the Elementary Students

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Abstract

Purpose- The main purpose of this study is to investigate the social class influence on child's perception of TV advertisement messages among the elementary students of Isfahan city.

Design/ methodology/approach- A survey of 385 elementary students of ages 7 to 11 was conducted in Esfahan City using a structured questionnaire.

Finding- The results showed that children's perception about TV ads intents ("to entertain", "make parents buy the product" and "to inform") are influenced by family social class. Also, there was a significant positive relationship between children's social class and their perception about why some TV ads are attractive. These factors were "using celebrity endorser", "using lyric", "because it is interesting for child's family" and "because his/her friends said so". But child's perception about truthfulness of TV advertisements wasn't influenced by family social class.

Originality/ value: So far no research has been encounter that had examined children's perception about TV ads intents in Iran with specific Islamic culture which it has.

Paper type- Research paper

Keywords: TV Advertisement, social class, intent, likeability, truthfulness, perception.

Introduction

Advertisements play an important role in customers' choice of goods or services, especially with children as consumers. Considering children make up one of the fastest growing market segments of end user (Wilson and Wood, 2004). Not only marketers see children as part of current market, but also as most important part of future market.

Children regard TV advertisements as an important information source for new products and services. Various factors such as age, social class, economic, message presentation, family structure and relationships governing the time watching television effect on child's perception of TV advertisements. Parents are usually as the most credible information source about advertisements for children (Fan and Li, 2009). So child's social class affects on its perception of TV advertisements.

Social class defined as homogeneous and reasonably permanent divisions in a society in which individuals and families sharing similar values, interests and behavior (Engel et al., 1993). Social class was identified by different variables such as economic variables (occupation, income and wealth), interaction variables (personal prestige, association and socialization) and political variables (power, class consciousness, mobility)(Dennis and Kahl,1982, Williams, 2002).Parents are generally concerned about their children, because TV advertising may lead a child to select material objects over more than socially alternatives and parent-child conflict rises and may lead to a more disappointed and unhappier child (Goldberg and Gorn, 1978; Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003). Children, who receive high control of TV viewing by their parents, comprehend TV advertisements less than those who encounter medium or low parental control (Bijmolt and Claassen, 2000).

However, there are many studies about advertisements designed for children, but it seems that there are limited researches about the relationship between family social class and child's perception of TV advertisements. The central question of this study is: does family social class affect on child's perception of TV advertisements? The answer should provide us with a better understanding of child's perception of TV advertisements from different family social class and thus also assist marketers and advertisers seeking to improve the effectiveness of TV advertisements for children from different social class.

Literature Review

Some of the researches into children's consumer behavior have been based on models of human learning. The age at which children learn to perceive the aim of advertising is depended on their parents' attitudes and level of education and their teachers' ability to explain advertising with children (Blandina, 2002).

Toward investigating the influence of social class on children's perception of TV advertisement, it is needed to describe the study constructs such as social class and children's perception in more detail.

Social class

Consumer socialization is defined as the process by which children and young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning in the marketplace (Lawlor and Prothero, 2007).

Socialization perspective, focused on 3 items including background factors (social class, age, gender...), socialization agents (family, mass media especially television advertising) and learning mechanisms which aimed children's attitude.

Social class, as in a class society, is a set of concepts in the social sciences and political theory centered on models of social stratification in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories (Andrew, 2001), the most common being the upper, middle, and lower classes. Advertising, as a form of social communication, is principally reflective of culture and its norms (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1996). Social values and cultural characteristics of the target viewers limit the choice of advertising themes used in one particular culture, because advertisements have to reflect individualistic values and direct at particular social classes (Isin and Alkiba, 2011; Hatzithomas et al, 2009). Social class is defined as homogeneous and comparatively stable divisions in a society in which individuals and families are sharing similar values, interests and behavior (Engel et al., 1993). In other words, Social class refers to broad group in society having common economic, cultural or political status. Children react to advertising messages in a method that is matching to their cultural values and norms (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1996).

In other words, social values and cultural characteristics of the children who watch advertising messages may limit the choice of advertising themes used in one particular culture. British advertisements not only show individualistic values and are expressed at particular social classes, but also disparaging sentimental humor and full comedy. In contrast, Greek advertisements reflect cognitive humorous appeals to provide trustworthy information to avoid of audience misgiving (Hatzithomas et al., 2010). Another aspect of, in collectivist cultures, social control mechanisms such as religious beliefs are use more widely than internal control. Also, social attitudes may vary depending on the context and time (Dianoux and Linhart, 2010). Child consumer move from a focus on aesthetic experiences to experiences of immersion and challenges of the senses (Gram, 2011). There is a positive correlation between self-acceptance and social class. So, lower classes have the lowest levels of self-acceptance (Houle, 2011). In other hand, there are several social factors that are associated with children's food acceptance such as modeling of food consumption by teachers and parents and availability of Foods at home and school for children. It means that, children's food acceptance is related to their family social class (Reinaerts et al, .2006).

Social class is still a significant and basic factor for market segmentation, because members of different social classes differ in many psychological characteristics and responses. It means that there is an expected relationship between social class and the psychological processes related to decision making and information – processing behavior centers on the basic factors associated with social status level. In other hand, education is strongly associated with profession, so it's connected with social class and affects on consumer information processing and decision making. Also, relation between social class and buying behavior is very considerable. Children of different social class levels, appear with different social values, so they have unlike buying behaviors. But Income level dose not correlate significantly with social values (Williams, 2002).

Some researchers believe that children's purchase behaviors are affected by their family or by their peer group. Although these social factors are sources of information and opinions about products and advertisements, these factors are special for each child, because parents in every household have special method of communication with their children (Gunter et al, 2005).

Child's perception of TV advertisement

Children are considered as an important target for advertisements and also they are defenseless against it. Although marketers affect children consumption behaviors, different laws limit the number, content and timing of advertisements for children (Asadollahi and Tanha, 2011). Researchers have attempted to design programs that not only teach children about the intent of advertisements, but also help children construct defenses against advertisement messages (Chan, 2001).

Children perceive advertisement with three different perspectives. Not only they comprehend advertisements from advertiser's perspective, but also they have realized them from viewer's perspective and television channels perspective. From viewer's perspective, advertisements have an informational function (Blosser and Roberts, 1985; Oates et al., 2002). According to children's point-of-view, advertising also can exert an advisory effect on viewers about personal health and safety. In other word, children can differentiate between an advertisement that seeks to sell, and that which looks for to provide information. From viewer's perspective, the children also identified an entertainment aspect to advertisements because they were attracted to advertisements that used of cartoon characters, humour, animals and swift action (Maher et al, 2006). Also, children refer commercial breaks as a mean to do other things such as eating a meal. Some children are aware of other perspective of the advertisements, namely that of the television channels perspective. This aspect indicates that these children are aware of interests which TV channels are vested on advertisement. In addition, children know that advertisements facilitates scheduled of TV programs and they are used for filling the gap between programs (Lawlor and Andrea, 2008).

There are four levels for children's understanding of advertising intent. The first level is child's inability to recognize advertising's persuasive intent. The second level is rudimentary level where child can separate an advertisement from a program. The third level is a semi-sophisticated understanding level. In this level, the child distinguishes that advertisements have informative and persuasive intents. Fourth level is highly sophisticated level, where children can recognition that not only an advertisement facilitates advertiser's commercial agenda, but also it can serve the interest of other parties such as the television station and the viewer. In other words, in this level, children are able to realize the perspective of the different groups who are exposed to advertisements (Lawlor and Andrea, 2008).

How children perceive advertisement intent can be related to their age. Although all of the children are exposed to the selling messages of TV advertisements, those who are less than 7 or 8 years of age in compare to elder ones are less aware of advertisements intent (Chan,2001, Nash & Karen, 2002). The perception of persuasive intent of an advertisement will cause to distrust to the advertised product (Rossiter 1979, D'Alessio et al, 2009). The elder children are more influenced by the quality of the opinions and claims of advertisements than younger children (Livingstone and Helsper, 2004).

Advertisements for children are largely colorful, and fascinating (Gupta and Kaur, 2010). Using celebrity endorsers to promote products is an accepted advertising technique around the world. Celebrity endorsers are one of the most important elements of advertisement which influenced on child's perception that an advertisement is being likable. When there is a good fit between celebrity endorser and the brand, celebrity can influence on audiences' attention, recall, and positive attitudes toward advertised product (Charbonneau and Garland, 2005).

While bright colors, lively music and simple messages are likeable factors in advertisements for younger people, advertisements for teenagers usually attract them through witty or stylish imagery and subtle messages (Livingstone and Helsper, 2004).

The experimental studies showed that advertisers have to consider the consumers' skepticism level when they use celebrities in order to advertise to different target groups of consumers (Bailey, 2007). Due to children's inability to distinguish the difference between commercial and noncommercial words, marketing directed at them can be misleading and unreliable (Pomeranz, 2010). Although majority of the children believe that advertisements play a role in choosing the best product among the different options available (Gupta and Kaur, 2010), many of Chinese parents have negative attitudes toward TV advertisements in general and children's advertisements specifically (Carter et al,2011).Because children of younger than eight lack the cognitive skills to understand the persuasive intent of television and online advertisements and especially they are defenseless against advertisements, (Calvert, 2008). That is why, younger children are more likely to perceive television advertisements truthful than elder ones (Chan, 2008). Source credibility has been identified as main factor in establishing efficient strategies for possibility of communication. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) which explains how persuasion operates by focusing on two routes to persuasion , was adapted to investigate the potential impact of risk type, information source, and persuasive content of information on individual involvement in elaborative, or thoughtful, cognitions about risk messages (Rucker and Petty 2006). The Elaboration Likelihood Model can be a very useful tool in persuasion technique. According to ELM, there are two routes for persuasion in accordance with the level of involvement which call central and peripheral routes. The central processing route of persuasion is successful for messages controlled, deep, systematic, and effortful. On the higher involvement level, adults elaborated the data via a central route. Because attitude changes via the central route seems to be more persistent and resistant. So, they are persuaded by means of a strong argument about features of appeared product in the advertisement On the other hand, the peripheral processing route of persuasion uses for messages with low receiver involvement level, low receiver motivation, and weak messages. So, adults elaborated the data via a peripheral route, and were persuaded by means of the appealing character (music, color, song, celebrity endorser etc) emerging in the advertisement (Heath and Feldwick, 2007 'Te'eni-Harariet al, .2009).

Obviously, not only involvement level of child plays a major role in perception of the elaboration process of advertising information, but also, child's cognitive development is a main factor for creating effective advertisements for children.

The effect of social class on children's perception of TV advertisement messages

Television advertisements are a powerful medium that affect children's perception about social reality. On other hand, perception is formed by the stimulus characteristics such as objects, brands and stories , and the social and cultural context in which it is transmitted and the customer characteristics such as knowledge, experience and expertise (Temperley and Tangen2006). So, the nature of advertisements which are targeting children is undividable from children's perception about those advertisements (Gunter et al, 2005). Not only TV advertisements have influence on children's intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns formation, but also the social class and parents play a major role in children's perception of advertisements (Asadollahi and Tanha, 2011). Although Children of higher social classes

watch TV advertisements less than others, children from higher socioeconomic background usually perceive the advertisement intent better than the children from lower socioeconomic strata (Ui Abideen and Waqas, 2009; Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006). It means that advertising exposure may also relate with the social class of the child and shape its knowledge and attitudes toward advertisements. Also, environment plays an important role in this regard (Goldberg, 1990, Desmond, Singer, & Singer, 1990, Gunter et al, 2005, UI Abideen and Waqas, 2009). Indeed children of middle- class are more receptive to advertising messages than working class children (Goldberg, 1990; Kapferer, 1985). Because working-class parents are less likely than middle-class parents mediate their children's viewing television (Desmond, Singer, & Singer, 1990). Another research proved that parents socialized their children in regard to the amount of time spent for communicating with them (Demo and Cox, 2000). So, the family culture and social class affects on children perception and socialization and marketers have to pay attention to both the children and the families when they develop advertisements messages (Isin and Alkibay, 2011). In other hand, social class affect on child's skeptical perception about advertisements. Chan research (2008) proved urban respondents were more skeptical towards advertising than rural children. Not only social class affects on child perception of advertisements, but also individual variables relating to social class influence on purchase evaluation criteria. Findings of some researches indicated that acceptance of foreign products raises the same as income increases (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972). Similarly, consumers from a higher level of education have tendency to rate foreign products more favourably (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Dornoff et al., 1974; Williams., 2002).

Therefore, based on what have been discussed following hypotheses can be developed.

H1: Family social class affects on child's perception of TV advertisement intent.

H2: Family social class affects on child's perception of TV advertisement likeability.

H3: Family social class affects on child's perception of TV advertisement truthfulness.

Research Methodology:

The aim of this study was to investigate social class influence on children's perception of TV advertisement messages. The samples of the study were drawn from students of 40 elementary schools of Isfahan City during October till January of 2009. A total sample of 385 students was obtained by means of cluster random sampling method. Data for the analyses presented in this report were included 220 boys (57 percent) and 165 girl (43 percent) that 45 students (11.7 percent) were considered to be included in "Low social class", and 293 students (76.1 percent) were considered to be included in "middle social class" and 47 students (12.2 percent) were considered to be included in "high social class". The respondents' age ranged from 7 to 11 years and their average age was 9 years. The data gathering tool were survey questionnaires and individual interviews. Questionnaires were administered between students of grade 3 to 5 and they answered to the questions by themselves. Also, researchers read the questions and possible answers for grades 1 and 2 students and they chose the proper answer.

Measures

The data gathering instrument was a structured questionnaire which its items were measured on a three-point interval scale. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part included demographic and socio-economic questions. Items which measure the respondents'

social class were parents' educational level, number and kind of family cars, number and kind of family travel, parents occupation, which they composed three level of "Low", "middle" and "high" social class .To measure the children's perception about TV advertisements intent seven items and for their perception about likeability of advertisements eleven items were used.Children's perception of TV advertisements intent and likeability of advertisements were measured on a scale ranging from "completely disagree" (1) to "completely agree" (3).But the children's perception about truthfulness of TV advertisements was measured on a three-point scale ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (3). In order to measure reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study with 30 questionnaires has been conducted and it has been tested by Cronach's alpha coefficient for which it has been calculated to be 80 percent. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts.

Result

The research hypotheses were examined by means of SPSS software (SPSS Inc, V16).The results of the study indicated that 11.7 percent of test takers were in the low social class, 76.1 percent of them in middle social class and the rest (12.2 percent) were included in high social class (table 1).The effect of social class on student's perception of the advertising intent is analyzed by using of ANOVAs test as the variance analysis test. The result of test the first hypothesis is summarized in table 2.

Table I: Frequency of children according to their Social class

Independent variables	Frequency	Frequency percent
low social class	45	11.76
Middle social class	293	76.1
high social class	47	12.2

The results show that the observed F was significant at the level of (0.05) for only for 3 out of 7 items. These items were "to inform", "to be bought by parents" and "to entertain". So, for these items the differences between of the answers of test takers in different social classes were significant (F=3.176, Sig=0.043; F=4.27, Sig=0.015; F=3.511, Sig=0.031). (F=3.176, Sig=0.043; F=4.27, Sig=0.015; F=3.511, Sig=0.031).

Table II: The result ANOVA test for child's perception of TV advertisement intent in different of Social class

Dependent variables	F	Sig
To entertain	3.176	0.043
To be bought by parents	4.277	0.015
To be bought by child	0.031	0.969
To persuade	0.36	0.698

To inform	3.511	0.031
To fill gaps between programs	1.299	0.274
To earn money	1.554	0.213

In other words, children of average social class in compare to those of high social class are more likely believe that TV advertisements are indented for their entertainments. Also, children of low and average social classes, in compare to those of high social class are more believed that the intent of TV advertisements is to make parents to buy products. Also, advertisements are more informative for children of low social class than those of high social class. Even though, the effect of child's social class on its perception of TV advertisement intent, in general was not significant.

Table III: The Multiple comparisons result of social class and Child's perception of TV advertisement intent

Dependent variables	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Sig	Mean Difference (i-j)	Social class (i)	Social class (j)
To entertain	0.5529	0.0266	0.031	0.28974	2	3
To be bought by parents	0.8134	0.0565	0.024	0.43499	1	3
	0.7027	0.1324	0.004	0.41754	2	3
To inform	0.7602	0.1108	0.009	0.43546	1	3

The result of hypothesis testing for social class influence on child's perception about likeability of TV advertisement is summarized in table IV. As it shown, children's belief about the likability of TV advertisement in three different social class differ only on the ground of using celebrity endorser, using lyric, because it is interesting for child's family and because his/her friends said so. The observed F was significant at the level of (0.05) only for these four items (F=11.53, $p < 0.05$, F= 3.238, $p < 0.05$, F= 0.033, $p < 0.05$, F= 3.158, $p < 0.05$).

Table IV: The ANOVA result of Social class and Child's perception about likeability of TV advertisement

Dependent variables	F	Sig
Using celebrity endorser	11.53	0.000
Using music	1.712	0.182
Using lyric	3.238	0.040
His/her family said so	3.442	0.033
Like advertised product	0.345	0.708
His/her friend said so	3.158	0.044

His/her classmate said so	2.379	0/094
Using cartoon characters	1.050	0.351
Offering beautiful product	0.937	0.393
Using beautiful persons	1.460	0.233
Famous company	0.920	0.399

Also, results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between children’s social class and their perception about likability of advertisements on the grounds of using celebrity endorser, using lyric, because it is interesting for child’s family and because his/her friends said so. This means that within studied group when TV advertisements are using celebrity endorser and lyric more likely to be perceived attractive for children’s of high social class than children’s of average and low social class. Table V also indicates children’s of low social class less likely perceive an advertisement attractive because it is interesting for his/her family or because his/her friends said so, than children of average and high social classes.

Table V: The Multiple comparisons result of Social class and Child’s perception about likeability of TV advertisement

Dependent variables	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Sig	Mean Difference (i-j)	Social class (i)	Social class (j)
Using celebrity endorser	0.9777	0/3670	0.000	0.67234	3	1
	0/7440	0/2839	0.000	0/51398	3	2
Using lyric	0/6365	0/0141	0.041	0.32530	3	1
	0/5296	0/0608	0/041	0.29519	3	2
His/her family said so	0/5579	0/0105	0/042	0.28419	2	1
	0/8261	0/1129	0/010	0/46950	3	1
His/her friend said so	0/5230	0/0257	0/031	0/27433	2	1
	0/7177	0/0700	0/017	0/39385	3	1

The results of analyzing of the social class influence on respondents’ perceptions about truthfulness of TV advertisements shows that the observed F wasn’t significant at (0.05) confident level. So, there isn’t any different Between Children’s perception of TV advertisement truthfulness in different social classes (F=1.798, Sig=0/167). So, the change of child’s social class isn’t necessarily would lead to change of perception about truthfulness of TV advertisements.

Table VI: The ANOVA result of Social class and Child’s perception of TV advertisement truthfulness

Dependent variables	F	Sig
Truthfulness	1.798	0/167

Discussion

Parents as the primary socialization agents for children appear to be the most influential in conducting their children. Also they play a role to modify the influence of other socialization agents such as mass media upon their children (Charbonneau and Garland, 2005). So, the family social class can influence child's interactions with other socialization sources. The purpose of this paper was to expand the literature concerning children's perception of advertising, with particular focus on social class and to determine whether children's perception of advertising in every social class differed from other social class.

The results showed that children from different social class perceive some aspect of advertisements' intent as of "to inform", "make parents buy the product" and "to entertain" differently. In other words, children of average social class in compare to those of high social class are more likely believe that TV advertisements are indented for their entertainments. Also, children of low and average social classes, in compare to those of high social class are more believed that the intent of TV advertisements is to make parents to buy products. TV advertisements are more entertaining for children of average social class, in compare to children with high social class. Also TV advertisements are more informative for children of low social class in compare to children of high social class. These results are confirmed with outcomes some researches such as Crosby & Grossbart (1984), Valkenburg (2000) and Baiocco et al., (2009). In fact, children in a family with a higher socioeconomic status have better parental control in television viewing. They watch TV advertisements less and they are less entertained with TV advertisements than other children. Also, parents with a high socioeconomic status can help to decrease their children's pleasure of TV advertisements. But these are only a few intents which children can presume for advertisement. Children of different societies with different culture and even different social class, based on their cognitive ability and the context which they have been exposed to, may enumerate so many intents for TV advertisements. In this study only a few of them have been studied. The results showed that children with different social class do not differ within respect to some intent which they presume for TV advertisements. Although some studies(Ul Abideen & Waqas ,2009 and Panwar& Agnihotri,2006) found that socioeconomic background of the family plays a considerable role in the perception of advertising intents by children. According to Williams (2002), purchase decision process and attitude toward its components such as perception of TV advertisements vary across social classes.

It is also realized that different aspects of TV advertisements which affect on its likability by children as of using celebrity endorser, using lyric, because it is interesting for child's family and because his/her friends said so, are influenced by the social class of the child. The findings partly validate the results proposed by Sheth et al. (1999) wherein he suggested that perception is shaped by the context in which stimulus is delivered (social, cultural).

Some previous researches showed that child's social class influence on his/her perception of TV advertisements attractiveness (Austin et al, 2006; Austin & Knaus, 2000; D'Alessio & Laghi, 2006; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). In this study it is shown that, children with different social class have different perception about what makes a TV advertisement attractive.

As it is shown when TV advertisements are using celebrity endorser and lyric more likely to be perceived attractive for children's of high social class than children's of average and low social class. It was also indicated that children's of low social class less likely perceive an advertisement attractive because it is interesting for his/her family or because his/her friends said so, than children of average and high social classes. This shows that children of low social

class have more independent personality and of course different cultures have different taste and different conducts.

Beside, findings of present study indicate that family social class didn't affect on children's perception about truthfulness of TV advertisements. But Chan (2008), showed that urban children were more skeptical towards TV advertising than rural children.

Iranian media law and regulations have placed certain restrictions about execution and nature of ads which are going to be broadcasted from TV channel which will limit their variety and how advertiser can maneuver with their tricks, so they are mostly informative in nature. Probably that is why Iranian children are less skeptical about ads, no matter to what social group they belong to.

Limitation of the Study

Although strict scientific criteria were adhered to throughout the research, it clearly has its limitations. This study, like all empirical research work, has certain limitations which affect the evaluation and generalization of its results. The use of a questionnaire as an information-gathering instrument also entails some limitations regarding the number of variables and scales to be included if the resulting questionnaire is to avoid being discouragingly long. Also, data were collected by a cross sectional method using a survey, so the results are limited to a specific period of time. Therefore, it would be recommended to replicate the same study with same variables in order to compare the results.

The generalization of the results is yet another limitation. Firstly, the results projected the perspectives of a sample with specific cultural values, therefore it is advisable to replicate this research in other settings and compare the results.

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