

1978

## **A survey on children's ability to distinguish television commercials from programme material**

Churchlands College Of Advanced Education

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks>



Part of the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)

---

Churchlands College of Advanced Education. (1978). *A survey on children's ability to distinguish television commercials from programme material*. Churchlands, Australia: Churchlands College of Advanced Education.  
This Report is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks/6873>

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

A SURVEY ON CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO  
DISTINGUISH TELEVISION COMMERCIALS  
FROM PROGRAMME MATERIAL.

CHURCHLANDS C.A.E.

A Report Prepared for an Independent  
Study in Library and Media Studies.

MURCHLANDS COLLEGE LIBRARY  
PERTH STREET  
CANTERBURY  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6015

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PAPER

This research paper on the effects of television commercials on children is divided into two major sections.

1. The first section deals with topics such as - childrens' ability to distinguish television commercials from programme material, source effects and self-concept appeals in childrens' television advertising, violence and unsafe acts in television commercials directed to children, the effects of the volume and repetition of television commercials and television advertising and parent child relations. This section is based on my readings and from non-print information sources.

Much work and research on these topics has been undertaken by Richard Adler in his book, "Research on the Effects of Television Advertising on Children", and Charles Atkin in "The Effects of Television Advertising on Children". It is from these works and others that the first section is based.

2. The second section of this research paper presents the findings of a questionnaire administered to 83 Perth primary school students. The questionnaire investigates and compares high socioeconomic childrens' attitudes to commercials and low to middle socioeconomic childrens' attitudes to commercials.

## INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

It is clear from the available evidence that television advertising does have an influence on children. Numerous research studies have demonstrated that children seem to learn from commercials, and that advertising is at least moderately successful in creating positive attitudes towards and the desire for products advertised. A strong determinant of children's perception of television advertising is the child's age. Research studies clearly establish that children become more skilled in evaluating television advertising as they grow older, and that to treat all children from 2 - 12 as one group makes important, perhaps crucial differences.

The question of the effects of television advertising on children has taken many forms, but it seems to be based upon four fundamental concerns (1).

- i) That children may be exposed to advertising for products or categories of products (such as drugs and heavily sugared foods) which may be hazardous if misused.
- ii) That any advertising directed at children is de facto 'bad' because it exploits their vulnerability.
- iii) That specific techniques used in television advertising may be deceptive or misleading to children who lack the skills to evaluate them properly.
- iv) That long term, cumulative exposure to television advertising may have the adverse consequences on the development of children's values, attitudes and behaviour.

Part One of this research paper has been divided into six chapters.

- 1) Children's Ability to Distinguish Television Commercials from Programme Material.
- 2) Source Effects and Self-Concept Appeals in Children's Television Advertising.
- 3) Violence and Unsafe Acts in Television Commercials

Directed to Children.

- 4) The Effects on Children of Television Food Advertising.
- 5) The Effects of the Volume and Repetition of Television Commercials.
- 6) Television Advertising and Parent Child Relations.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH TELEVISION COMMERCIALS FROM PROGRAMME MATERIAL.

There are two different, but related kinds of viewer comprehension. The first involves the ability of a viewer simply to see commercials as separate material from the adjacent programming; the second deals with the viewer's understanding of the selling purpose of commercials. For adult viewers, we can generally assume that perception of a television advertisement is accompanied by an understanding of its promotional purpose. We cannot make the same assumption if the viewers are children. That is, some children may be able to correctly identify a television message as a commercial and still not understand its purpose.

We must look at the aspects of comprehension when questioning whether a child's inability to make the accurate distinctions between commercial and programme material may provide the advertiser with an unfair advantage. (2).

- i) Do children see commercial messages to be distinct and different from programme content?  
What conditions act to blur children's perception of the separation between commercial advertisements and programme content?  
To the extent that children do not spontaneously separate commercial and programme content, what can be done to assist them in making the distinction.

- ii) To the extent that children do distinguish commercials from programme content, are they able to assign different intentions to the two? Specifically, do children identify the selling of a product as the intention from the intention of programme intent? Finally, to the extent that children perceive commercials to be distinct from programmes and

are able to understand the sales intention of the commercials, does this awareness act as a mediator between commercial messages and their resulting persuasive effects?

Children's ability to distinguish between programme and commercial has only been measured indirectly, using either verbal or attentional measures.

Studies using verbal answers to general questioning have found a positive relationship between age and children's verbal ability to differentiate between programmes and commercials. [Younger children, below eight or nine, either express confusion or base their discrimination of commercials on affect or on superficial preceptual cues, such as a commercials shorter length.] Older children are able to tell the difference between programme and commercial material on the basis of an overall understanding of each message's meaning.

Studies of visual attention patterns have tended to infer discrimination of commercial and programme material from observed changes in children's attention levels between programme segments and commercial announcements. However, there is also evidence suggesting, alternatively, that these changes in attention are caused by audio-visual changes taking place between advertising and the programme.

[A large number of children, especially those below eight years, express little or no understanding of the persuasive intent of commercials.] Development of this understanding may depend on children's general level of cognitive functioning as well as their ability to make a number of specific prior distinctions about the nature of commercials, starting with the discrimination of commercials as distinct from programmes.

Younger children who are unaware of the selling motives of television advertising tend to express greater belief in commercials and a higher frequency of purchase requests for certain advertised products than do older children who understand the intent of

commercials. These differences suggest that a more mature concept of the nature and purpose of advertising acts as a mediating influence between commercials and their effectiveness as persuasive messages.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SOURCE EFFECTS AND SELF-CONCEPT APPEALS IN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION ADVERTISING

Characters of all sorts- human and non human, live-action or animated- appear as product presenters or product users in most children's commercials. Their dealings with the product being advertised ranges from a co-incidental presence in the commercial to open endorsement. The term source effect refers to the impact of these characters on the television audience.

Critics of television advertising for children allege that the use of such characters creates source effects that take unfair advantage of the young viewer. The following listing from Adler defines a number of these alleged negative source effects. (3)

- i) Certain types of characters in commercials, notably programme personalities and cartoon character, may contribute to children's confusion between programmes and advertisements. This is termed the Confusion Effect. The confusion effect may be heightened when the programme personalities and cartoon characters appear in commercials shown within or adjacent to their own programmes. This is called the Adjacency Effect.
- ii) Celebrities or authority figures, such as a policeman, an astronaut, or a mother, can lead children to attribute to the endorsed product qualities it does not have. This is called the Endorsement Effect.
- iii) Certain characteristics of product presenters or users - notably their sex, race, occupation, or social behaviour can contribute to children learning stereotypes. This is called the Social Stereotype Effect.
- iv) Certain types of advertising appeals, usually but not always involving product presenters or users, may effect a child's self-concept. This is called the Self-Concept Effect. Personal enhancement appeals, social status appeals, exaggerated or unrealistic product usage portrayals, and competitive product appeals fall into this category.

Let us now look at the Confusion Effect, Endorsement Effect and the Social Stereotype Effect in more detail.

### Confusion Effect.

Although a large number of young children experience confusion between programmes and commercials, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that the use of programme characters in commercials contribute to this confusion. A true test of the confusion effect would require a more instant measure of children's ability to tell the difference between programme content and commercial content. Otherwise, it is not clear whether you are testing children's memories or their actual perceptual inability to discriminate.

### Endorsement Effect.

One study of the endorsement effect actually found negative endorsement effects. The subjects did not like the endorser and gave the endorsed product lower ratings. At least four studies have shown that a significant change in rated affect toward the endorsed product can occur with even a passive or "mere appearance" endorsement.

### Social Stereotype Effect.

It is almost impossible to determine whether or not commercials contribute to the formulation of social stereotypes. Ratio figures of social cue content in commercials (young-old, male-female) suggest that they at least have the potential to do so. Children's commercials are biased towards adults on the age ratio and towards males on the sex ratio. If the ratios can effect children's beliefs about the real world - and there is evidence from television programme research that they can - an extremely complex and value laden issue is raised. The issue is whether commercials should be expected to match real world ratios or whether some kind of over-compensation is justified. (More of this is investigated in the second section of this research paper.)

## CHAPTER THREE

### VIOLENCE AND UNSAFE ACTS IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS DIRECTED TO CHILDREN.

Although violence and unsafe acts do not occur very often in commercials directed to children, this issue warrants special attention because of the seriousness of the effects that may be involved. There are three and they are important because their effects largely involve a common mechanism among children - imitation (4).

#### i) Fantasy violence in commercials

When violence is shown in advertisements it is most likely to be in the form of fantasy i.e. in a cartoon or other make believe presentation.

#### ii) Commercials adjacent to Violent programmes

An increasing number of sponsors are withdrawing commercial support from certain television programmes that they consider to be excessively violent. This moralistically motivated action hides a more serious consideration for advertisers: that commercials may actually interact with violent programme content to affect viewers; and specifically children's, behaviour and attitudes toward violence.

#### iii) Unsafe Acts in Safety Messages

There has been little said regarding the idea that unsafe acts should not be shown in children's commercials. However, public service announcements which attempt to teach children not to engage in unsafe behaviour have generally been considered exempt from this proposition. The issue is whether the very portrayal of unrecommended or dangerous acts might lead to children's imitation of the acts.

Now let us examine these three effects in more detail.

#### Fantasy Violence.

The type of violence employed in children's commercials (and in most children's programmes) is almost always in the fantasy category. (Adler, 1977 p 82)

The impact of the violent portrayal varies accordingly to the number of fantasy cues present in the portrayal: Cartoon violence usually has three cues to indicate fantasy (animation, humour, and a remote setting); make believe violence generally has two cues (humour and a remote setting); and realistic, acted violence generally has only one cue (the viewer's knowledge that the portrayal is fictional). Real-life violence (e.g. footage of actual violence, as in newsfilms) has, of course, no cues to suggest fantasy.

There is evidence from one study that a lot of children as young as four years can distinguish these four levels of violence. However, about a quarter of four to eight year olds define cartoon violence as depictions of violence per se; about a half of this age group also see make-believe violence in this way; and over half of four to eight year olds see realistic (acted) violence as violence. Children appear to make these distinctions solely on the basis of the physical fantasy cues: there is no support for the idea that children, especially young children, can differentiate types of violence in a more cognitive or rational basis.

#### Commercials in Violent Programmes

It has been suggested that violent programmes may produce aggression only if they are shown with (i.e. interrupted by) commercials.

Also important is the contrary possibility: that commercials may provide a socially valuable function by toning down or defusing excitement generated by violent or otherwise highly arousing scenes in television shows.

#### Unsafe Acts in Safety Messages

The trouble with unsafe acts is that their depiction may lead to dangerous imitation by children. The evidence indicates that illustrations of unsafe behaviour, even when punished in the commercial message, may make that behaviour more salient and possibly more attractive to children than it would normally be.

Present indications are that safety commercials should emphasise only the rewarding consequences of safe behaviour. Prevention of unsafe acts should be left to direct in-home or in-school training and not to television.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN OF TELEVISION FOOD ADVERTISING

Criticism of food advertising on television has been directed both at the quality of the food products and at their methods of presentation in television commercials.

It has been claimed that what a child's developing sense of what our culture deems fit to eat is influenced by the foods that he or she sees in television commercials. Other important influencing factors are also involved, of course, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and nutritional education by parents.

Critics of food advertising say that the presence of television advertising of ready-to-eat cereals, lollies, and other sweetened snacks suggests to children that these products are appropriate and desirable to eat.

Critics of food advertising also take issue that the relationship of good balanced eating habits to health is rarely included or emphasised in children's food commercials, and nutritional information about the advertised food products and services is seldom provided.

Thus, questions have been raised about whether food advertising has an influence on children's nutritional knowledge and attitudes towards food and good nutrition, their eating habits, and even their physical health. Critics have argued as well that food commercials may be disruptive to parent-child relationships, in that conflicts may be precipitated when parents refuse children's requests for the advertised foods.

#### Characteristics of Food Commercials

In general, food commercials appearing on children's programmes tend to associate the advertised foods with specific brand name information, with taste/flavour descriptions, with "fun" and,

particularly in the case of cereals, with premiums and animated 'presenter' characters. Food advertisements directed to children offer little nutritional information.

#### Mediating Variables

Children respond differently to food advertising according to their ages. A number of studies report an increase with age in the product information (e.g. brand names) that children retain from food commercials as well as in their knowledge about the validity of nutritional claims.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE EFFECT OF THE VOLUME AND REPETITION OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS.

This section deals with the effects of television advertising resulting from the frequency of childrens' exposure to commercials. Volume refers to the frequency of exposure to commercials in general. The term repetition refers to frequency of exposure to a particular commercial.

According to Adler, four main issues are apparent, three relating to volume and one to repetition (5).

i) That long term effects may result from childrens' exposure to commercials. Alleged effects include a greater susceptibility to persuasion, development of materialistic values and, more positively, certain consumer socialization effects such as appreciation of the marketing and economic environment.

ii) That certain effects may result from frequent exposure to commercials through 'heavy viewing' within age groups. Susceptibility to persuasion is the most common of these alleged effects. To distinguish these more immediate effects from the previous long-term category they will be called heavy-viewing effects.

iii) That volume effects are also relevant in the short term via the 'clustering' of commercials in blocks between programmes versus distributing them between and during programmes. Proponents of clustering allege that it helps children to discriminate between programme content and advertising content. Opponents allege that clustering leads to 'clutter' and poorer individual commercial performance, which unfairly penalize the advertiser.

iv) That repetition of the same commercial results in stronger effects than a single exposure. Most often, the allegation is that increased susceptibility to persuasion results from such repetition, but also included are other potential effects such as 'irritation'.

### Long-Term Exposure Effects

A lot of research on childrens' responses to television commercials has been that which documents the dramatic age-related increase in their cognitive understanding of the nature and purpose of commercials and the equally dramatic decline in their feelings toward television commercials as an institution. However, their behavioural responsiveness to commercials-as reflected by stated desires for advertised products and by frequency of requests to parents for these products-declines only slightly over the childhood period.

This paradox involves a real contradiction only if we assume that commercials should not be responded to. If most commercials children see are non-deceptive and promote bona fide products, there is no reason why increased cognitive understanding should reduce childrens' preferences for the products advertised (nor why lack of cognitive understanding should increase them). To hold other than this view is to assume that deceptive practices and shoddy products are the rule in childrens' television advertising. Still, part of the paradox remains: Why do children develop such negative attitudes towards advertising as they grow older?

### Heavy Viewing Effects

Heavy viewing effects are somewhat different from long-term exposure effects in that they focus on the effects of volume within age-groups rather than on the cumulative volume across different age groups. Perhaps the most important conclusion in conjunction with heavy television viewing- and, by implication heavy exposure to commercials- is that such viewing does not retard childrens' cognitive understanding of advertising. On the other hand, heavy viewing does not accelerate it either.

However, heavy television viewers at each age level do tend to hold more favourable attitudes toward commercials and toward products they see advertised. This is especially pronounced at younger age levels, at least until six, and there is some evidence that this heavy viewer difference persists at a noticeable but diminished magnitude thereafter.

A possible explanation is that heavy viewers tend to see more products that they like, so that their aggregate liking of commercial and aggregate total of expectations based on commercials is higher because of differential product-generated reinforcement.

### Clustering Effects

A third aspect of the volume issue is posed by the question of whether clustering of childrens' commercials would benefit children- or maybe penalize advertisers. The evidence on both questions is inconclusive. The separation issue has not been resolved because appropriate measures of childrens' discriminatory ability have not been employed in studies to date. The clutter issue is unresolved because experiments on clustering have used non-novel commercials whose effects (e.g., brand name recall) could have been attained prior to the clustering manipulations in the studies.

### Repetition Effects

There seems to be little basis for concern that repetition leads to greater persuasion-unless by persuasion we mean no more than the ability to remember the brand name mentioned in the commercial. A considerable amount of secondary research in learning theory and the available primary research indicate that neither the rate at which children encounter a commercial nor the total number of times they encounter it, beyond the first one or two exposures, has any incremental effect on either their liking of the brand or their intention to request or buy it.

In Gorn and Goldberg, Krugman (1972) suggests that first exposure to a commercial message produces a mainly cognitive response of attempting to comprehend a novel stimulus. The response to the second exposure is predominantly evaluative with the person determining the personal relevance of the message, and with the third exposure he begins to disengage from what is perceived as a complete task.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TELEVISION ADVERTISING AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS

There has been great concern about the effects of advertising on family relations. This concern takes several forms.

- i) Consumption requests by children, particularly those attributed to advertising, may strain parent-child relations.
- ii) This strain may be greatest among economically disadvantaged families, who presumably must deny most requests.
- iii) Denial may be frustrating to both parent and child, leading to guilt and resentment.
- iv) Childrens' requests may complicate family consumption priorities, leading to maladaptive practices, especially among the poor.

## PART TWO

### CHILDRENS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Part two of this research paper tries to investigate the attitudes of children toward television commercials. To do this I have developed a hypothesis:

-That childrens' attitudes toward television commercials reflect the childrens' socioeconomic status. Children in the lower socioeconomic classes have more positive attitudes toward television commercials; those in the higher socioeconomic classes have more negative attitudes. It is also assumed that the greater the amount of exposure to television programmes, the more positive the attitude of the child toward television commercials.

The attitudes of children to television commercials are significant for three important reasons according to Clara Ferguson. Firstly, she recognises that children represent a substantial and significant consumer market for many product categories. Second, she sees they are an influential force in the purchase of products directly consumable as well as those used by the entire family. And thirdly, she says children represent a future consumer market whose attitudes toward products advertised and toward television commercials are in the process of formation. (7)

#### Sample

The sample used for this study consisted of year 6 and year 7 students from Graylands Primary and Mount Pleasant Primary. The schools were selected in such a manner as to be representative of low to middle and high socioeconomic areas of the city. Of the 83 questionnaires administered to children included in the sample all were considered to be usable. The analysis of the data gathered in the survey is based on the responses of the 83 questionnaires. Of the 83 children, 25 children were in year seven and 58 were in year six.

### Measurement

The questionnaire used in this study was divided into two main parts, and was based on a questionnaire used by Clara Ferguson in 'Preadolescent Childrens' Attitudes Toward Television Commercials'

(Part 1) The children answered questions by ticking what they felt was the appropriate response. The categories studied were reality, purpose, degree of discrimination between television programmes and television commercials, classes of products recalled, complexity of recall, and perceived validity and credibility of advertisements.

(Part 2) The children were asked to rank the sentences regarding television commercials on a five point scale. A score of 3.0 indicated neutrality; a score below 3.0 indicated a negative - tending attitude; and a score above 3.0 indicated a positive-tending attitude.

In the third part the children were asked to take home a television listing of shows being broadcast that night and tick the shows they watched. The day of the survey was the 31st of October, 1978.

### Limitations

First, owing to time and limited money, the sample used was limited in size. Obviously 83 children is not a large sample.

Second, childrens' attitudes toward television commercials were limited to those commercials televised on the two commercial stations in Perth.

Third, only one day's sample of childrens' viewing patterns was possible.

Four, for simplicity all children from Graylands Primary were included as being from low to middle socio-economic homes and all children from Mount Pleasant Primary were included as being from high socio-economic homes. A look at the occupations of the fathers' tends to varify this.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF T.V. SETS IN THE HOMES

<u>T.V. Sets</u>	<u>Status</u>				<u>Overall Total</u>	
	<u>High</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Low to Middle</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
0	2	6.9	1	1.8	3	3.6
1	10	34.5	23	42.6	33	39.8
2	9	31.0	25	46.2	34	41.0
3	6	20.7	5	9.2	11	13.2
4	2	6.9	0	0	2	2.4
Total	29	100%	54	99.8%	83	100%

Survey Findings

The first question asked in the survey was how many television sets were in the childrens' families. As can be seen from Table 1 most homes have at least one or two television receivers.

41 percent of the surveyed children had two television sets and 39.8 percent had one television set. It was also interesting to note that 3.6 per cent of the children did not have a television receiver.

When comparing the two socio-economic groups it can be seen that 34.5 percent of the high socio-economic groups compared to 42.6 percent of the low to middle socio-economic group had one television set, and 31.0 percent compared to 46.2 percent had two television receivers.

A noticeable difference occurred in the percentage of children with three televisions. 20.7 percent of high socio-economic families had three televisions compared to 9.2 per cent of low to middle socio-economic families.

### PART 1

#### UNDERSTANDING OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

The children were asked to tick one of the six responses to the question "What is a television commercial"? The responses, "it names specific products", "it is part of the television show" and "it interrupts the television show", were classified as low levels of awareness, or indications of "confused perceptions, based on coincidental reasoning or affect." The responses "it advertises things" and "it informs people about products, shows, things to buy" were classified as medium awareness, which indicate "judgement based on reality of object or person portrayed (i.e. similarity to objects, persons or events in the real world). The response "it sponsors or pays for the television show" was classified as high awareness, indicating "judgement based on understanding the nature of sponsorship and basic purposes of advertising.

TABLE 2

WHAT IS A TELEVISION COMMERCIAL?

Responses	Total sample %	Socioeconomic Status	
		High %	Low to Middle %
It names specific products	0	0	0
It is part of the T.V. show	1.2	3.4	0
It interrupts the T.V. show	19.3	17.2	20.4
Low Awareness total	20.5	20.6	20.4
It advertises things	33.7	34.5	33.3
It informs people about products, shows, things to buy.	41	41.4	40.7
Medium Awareness total	74.7	75.9	74.0
It sponsors or pays for the T.V. show	4.8	3.4	5.5
High Awareness total	4.8	3.4	5.5

As Table 2 shows 20.5 percent of the sample were classified as having low awareness of what a television commercial is, 74.7 percent were classified as having a medium awareness, and 4.8 percent were classified as having high awareness.

Grouping of the data according to socio-economic levels reveals that 3.4 percent of the children in the high socio-economic class indicated a high awareness of what a television commercial is. And 5.5 percent of the children in the low to middle socio-economic class indicated a high awareness level. The medium awareness level contained the largest number of responses, with 75.9 percent from the high socio-economic class and 74 percent from the low to middle socio-economic class. 20.6 percent from the high socio-economic class and 20.4 from the low to middle socio-economic class indicated a low awareness level.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

The children were asked to tick one of five responses to the question, "Why are commercials shown on Television?" This question was designed to measure childrens' understanding of the purpose of television commercials. The responses "to help and inform you" and "to entertain you" were classified as low levels of understanding. The responses "to make people buy things" and "to sell products" were classified as medium levels of understanding. The response "to get people to buy things so that the advertiser can pay for the show" was classified as a high level of understanding. A low level of understanding indicated that the children were confused, unaware of the selling motive of the profit-seeking motive of television commercials. A medium level of understanding indicated that the children had some recognition of the selling motive and some awareness of the profit-seeking motive of television advertising. A high level of understanding indicated that the children had a clear recognition of the selling and profit-seeking motives of television advertising.

TABLE 3

WHY ARE COMMERCIALS SHOWN ON T.V.?

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Sample</u> %	<u>Socio economic Status</u>	
		<u>High</u> %	<u>Low to</u> <u>Middle</u> %
To help and inform you	24.1	20.7	25.9
To entertain you	3.6	3.4	3.7
<u>Low Understanding</u> <u>Level</u>	27.7	24.1	29.6
To make people buy things	48.2	55.2	44.4
To sell products	21.7	20.7	22.2
<u>Medium Understanding</u> <u>Level</u>	69.9	75.9	66.6
To get people to buy things so that the advertiser can pay for the show	2.4	0	3.7
<u>High Understanding</u> <u>level</u>	2.4	0	3.7

As shown in Table 3, 27.7 percent of the sample had a low level of understanding of the purpose of television advertising, 69.9 percent of the sample had a medium level of understanding and 2.4 percent of the sample had a high level of understanding.

Survey data grouped according to socio-economic status reveal that 29.6 percent of the low to middle socio-economic children had a low level of understanding compared to 24.1 percent of the high socio-economic children. A medium level of understanding of the purpose of television commercials was demonstrated by 75.9 percent of the high socio-economic children and 66.6 percent of the low to middle class children. A high level of understanding was displayed by 3.7 percent of the low to middle socio-economic children compared to 0 percent of high socio-economic children.

#### DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN TELEVISION PROGRAMMES AND TELEVISION COMMERCIALS.

The children were asked to tick one of the five responses to the question, "What is the difference between a television programme and a commercial?" This question was designed to determine the childrens' ability to discriminate between television programmes and television commercials. The responses "a commercial is short, a programme is long" and "a commercial is before or after a television show" were classified as low levels of differentiation. The responses "a television programme has a story, theme, moral" and "a television programme is supposed to entertain you" were classified as medium levels of differentiation. The response "television commercials sell; make money" was classified as a high level of differentiation. A low level of differentiation indicated that the children were not able to clearly distinguish a television commercial from a television programme.

As is shown in Table 4, 34.9 percent of the total sample had a low ability to distinguish between television programmes and a commercial. 60.2 percent had a medium ability of differentiation, and 4.8 percent had a high ability of differentiation.

From the perspective of socio-economic status, 0 percent of the high class, and surprisingly 7.4 percent from the low to middle class indicated a high level of differentiation.

Exhibiting a medium ability to differentiate were 62 percent of the children from the high socio-economic class and 59.2 percent from the low to middle socio-economic class. 37.9 percent of the children from the high socio-economic class and 33.3 percent from the low to middle class exhibited a low discrimination ability.

TABLE 4  
DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN T.V. PROGRAMMES  
AND T.V. COMMERCIALS

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Sample</u>	<u>Socio economic Status</u>	
		<u>High</u>	<u>Low to Middle</u>
A commercial is short, a programme is long.	34.9	37.9	33.3
A commercial is before or after a T.V. show	0	0	0
Low differentiation total	34.9	37.9	33.3
A T.V. programme has a story, theme, moral.	32.5	31	33.3
A T.V. programme is supposed to entertain you	27.7	31	25.9
Medium differentiation total	60.2	62	59.2
T.V. commercials sell; make money.	4.8	0	7.4
High differentiation total	4.8	0	7.4

### Classes of Products/Advertisements Recalled

Children were asked first to name their favourite television commercial, then tick their reasons for liking it. In addition, they were asked to name their least favourite commercial and to tick their reasons for their dislike. They were also asked to name two other commercials they liked and two others they disliked.

Data in table 5 reveals that drink and food items ranked the highest in childrens's likings.

TABLE 5

#### LIKED AND DISLIKED COMMERCIALS

<u>Name of Advertisement</u>	<u>Favourite Advertisement (Frequency)</u>	<u>Least-Favourite Advertisement (Frequency)</u>
Coke	39	10
Life be in it	15	
150th Anniv	13	
Whirlpool	7	11
Peter's Pies	6	
Mrs Sparkle	5	
Where do you get it?		12
S.T.D.		6
Humpty Dumpty		6
Total	85	Total 45

Advertisements for electical appliances and grocery items ranked highest among the most disliked. It was interesting to note that some children could not think of more than one commercial they disliked or liked.

TABLE 6

REASONS FOR LIKING COMMERCIALS

	Frequency	Percentage
It is funny	26	31.3
It tells you something about a product or a show	5	6
It shows real people, objects, actions	16	19.3
I have tried the product advertised	2	2.4
I like the product advertised	12	14.5
Don't know	22	26.5

Data in table 6 reveal that the major reason given for liking a particular commercial is that "it is funny".

TABLE 7

REASONS FOR DISLIKING COMMERCIALS

	Frequency	Percentage
The message is dumb or stupid	29	34.9%
I don't like the people in the commercial	14	16.9
It shows unreal people, objects, actions.	4	4.8
It is shown too often on T.V.	12	14.4.
Product isn't like the commercial says it is	8	9.6
Don't know	16	19.3

Data in Table 7 reveals that the overwhelming reason given for disliking a particular commercial is that "the message is dumb or stupid". Both the reason for liking a particular commercial and the reason for disliking a commercial concerns the entertainment value.

## Perceived Credibility and Validity of Commercials

Children were asked "Do commercials generally tell the truth?" 31 percent of high socioeconomic children answered yes, and 27.8 percent of low to middle socioeconomic children answered yes. The largest difference occurred with the no response.

TABLE 8

### DO T.V. COMMERCIALS TELL THE TRUTH?

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Sample</u>	<u>Socio economic Status</u>	
		<u>High %</u>	<u>Low to Middle %</u>
Yes	24	31	27.8
No	53	58.6	66.6
Don't know	6	10.3	5.6

66.6 percent of the low to middle socioeconomic group thought that television commercials don't tell the truth, and 58.6 of the high socioeconomic group thought that commercials don't tell the truth.

Respondents were asked to tick the reasons why they felt that television commercials did or did not generally tell the truth. It is clear from the data presented in Table 9 and Table 10 that children use tests of reality as a means of determining the believability of television advertising. The predominant reason for believing that television commercials generally tell the truth was, "I have tried some of the products advertised".

TABLE 9

REASONS WHY CHILDREN BELIEVE COMMERCIALS  
GENERALLY TELL THE TRUTH

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Most of the products and objects shown exist	10	23.3
I see the products advertised in the shops	10	23.3
I have tried some of the products	12	27.9
The commercials seem realistic	5	11.6
Commercials must tell the truth or they will get in trouble	1	2.3
My parents say that commercials generally tell the truth	3	7
My friends say commercials generally tell the truth	0	0
Don't know	2	4.6
Total	43	100

The most frequently mentioned reason for believing that television commercials generally do not tell the truth was, "Products are not like the commercials say they are". Parental influence and peer influence were the least frequently mentioned reasons for either believing or not believing that television commercials tell the truth.

TABLE 10

REASONS WHY CHILDREN BELIEVE COMMERCIALS  
GENERALLY DO NOT TELL THE TRUTH

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Commercials show unreal people, objects, actions.	5	5.2
Commercials don't show everything	16	16.7
Commercials are generally exaggerated	27	28

Table 10 (contd)

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
My parents say that commercials are not true	2	2.1
My friends say that commercials are not true	2	2.1
I don't see things advertised in the shop	4	4.2
Products are not like the commercials say they are	34	35.4
You must buy the product advertised to be sure	6	6.3
Don't know	0	0
Total	<u>96</u>	<u>100</u>

CHILDRENS' ATTITUDE TO THE AMOUNT  
OF TIME SPENT ON TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Children were asked to tick the response they thought should be the maximum time allowed for commercials each hour. They were told that the present time allowed per hour was eleven minutes. 83.1 percent of the children surveyed indicated that they would like to see a maximum time allowed per hour of 5 minutes or less. And not surprisingly 0 children indicated that there should be more than 11 minutes of commercials per hour.

TABLE 11  
MAXIMUM TIME PER HOUR OF COMMERCIALS

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Socio-economic Status</u>	
	<u>Sample</u>	High %	Low to Middle%
No advertisements	31.3	24.1	35.2
1 -4 minutes	31.3	34.5	29.6
5 minutes	20.5	17.2	22.2
6 - 8 minutes	12	17.2	9.3
9-10 minutes	2.4	3.5	1.8
11 minutes	2.4	3.5	1.8
More than 11 minutes	0	0	0

## PART 2

Ten descriptive statements regarding television commercials were included in the questionnaire. The children were asked to describe their feeling or attitude toward each statement on a scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Five of these statements were favourable descriptions of television commercials and five statements were unfavourable descriptions of television commercials. The favourable statements were scored from 5 for "strongly agree" to 1 for "strongly disagree". The unfavourable statements were scored from 1 for "strongly agree" to 5 for "strongly disagree". A high score represented a positive or favourable attitude toward television commercials; a low score represented a negative or unfavourable attitude.

The responses of the high socioeconomic children are shown in Table 12, and the responses of the low to middle are shown in Table 13. Also shown on each table are the total scores for each statement (i.e. the 5 point scale already mentioned).

TABLE 12

### HIGH SOCIOECONOMIC CHILDRENS' ATTITUDE TOWARD COMMERCIALS

<u>Attitude</u> <u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Undec.</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>Total</u>
<b>FAVOURABLE</b>						
Commercials are interesting to watch because they are funny	6.9%	10.3%	34.5%	41.4%	6.9%	268.9
Commercials are realistic because advertisers want to help people.	3.4	13.8	51.8	17.2	13.8	275.8
Commercials must be truthful or advertisers will get in trouble	0	6.9	27.6	44.8	20.7	220.7
Commercials are generally informative because they tell you about a product or show	34.5	24.1	20.7	20.7	0	372.4

Table 12 (contd)

Attitude Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undec.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Commercials are educational because you can learn about products that are being sold	0	10.3	20.7	20.7	48.3	193
UNFAVOURABLE						
Commercials are false because products are not like commercials say they are	34.5%	24.1%	13.8%	20.7%	6.9%	241.4
Commercials are boring because they talk about things I'm not interested in	37.9	41.4	13.8	3.4	3.4	192.7
Commercials are dumb or stupid either because of the actors or the product message.	27.6	48.3	20.7	3.4	0	199.9
Commercials are exaggerations because advertisers just want you to buy their products.	55.2	31	10.3	3.4	0	161.7
Commercials are irritating because they interrupt the programme I am watching	62.1	27.6	3.4	3.4	3.4	158.1
Overall Total =						2284.6

TABLE 13

LOW TO MIDDLE SOCIOECONOMIC CHILDRENS'  
ATTITUDE TOWARD COMMERCIALS

Attitude Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undec.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Score
FAVOURABLE						
Commercials are interesting to watch because they are funny	0%	24.1%	14.8%	42.6%	18.5%	244.5

Table 13 (contd)

Attitude Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undec.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Score
FAVOURABLE						
Commercials are realistic because advertisers want to help people	3.7%	13%	37%	25.9%	20.4%	253.7
Commercials must be truthful or advertisers will get in trouble	9.3	13	7.4	40.7	29.6	231.7
Commercials are generally informative because they tell you about a product or show	34.5	24.1	20.7	20.7	0	372.4
Commercials are educational because you can learn about products that are being sold	5.6	11	18.5	29.6	35.2	221.9
UNFAVOURABLE						
Commercials are false because products are not like commercials say they are	22.2	37	12.9	20.4	7.4	253.5
Commercials are boring because they talk about things I'm not interested in	35.2	27.8	14.8	14.8	7.4	231.9
Commercials are dumb or stupid either because of the actors or the product message	22.2	35.2	18.5	22.2	1.9	246.4
Commercials are exaggerations because advertisers just want you to buy their product	50	33.3	9.3	1.9	5.5	179.6
Commercials are irritating because they interrupt the programme I am watching	72.2	14.8	3.7	1.9	7.4	157.5
Overall Total =						2393.1

The responses of the children for all ten statements were totalled according to socioeconomic status. The minimum possible score, which would represent an extremely negative attitude was 1000. The maximum possible score, which would represent an extremely positive attitude, was 5000. A score of 2500 would represent neutrality.

### Summary

Both the high socioeconomic children and the low to middle socioeconomic children had slightly negative attitudes to commercials shown on television. As mentioned previously a score of 2500 was neutral. The high socioeconomic children had an overall total of 2284.6 which meant that they had a slightly more negative attitude toward commercials than did the low to middle socioeconomic children who recorded an overall total of 2393.1.

It was hypothesized that childrens' attitude toward television commercials are a reflection of the childrens' socioeconomic status:- That children in the lower socioeconomic class have more positive attitudes toward television commercials and children in the higher socioeconomic class have more negative attitudes.

The research presented here shows that both socioeconomic classes have negative attitudes toward commercials, but high socioeconomic children have more negative attitudes than the low to middle socioeconomic children.

### PART 3

The third part of section 2 in this research paper deals with childrens' viewing habits and the commercials shown during peak viewing times for children.

The 83 children used for the questionnaire in the previous pages were asked to tick what shows they watched on the 31st October, 1978.

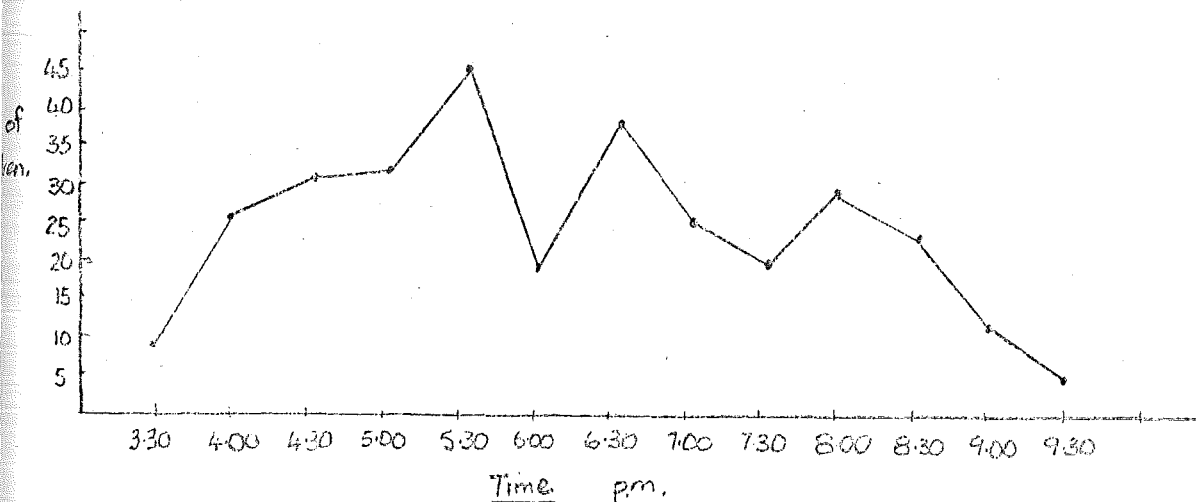
TABLE 14

NUMBER OF HOURS WATCHED ON THE SURVEY NIGHT

<u>Number of hours</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage %</u>
0	8	9.6
0-1	13	15.7
1-2	25	30.1
2-3	20	24.1
3-4	9	10.8
4-5	5	6
5-6	3	3.6

On the survey date 30.1 percent of the children watched between one and two hours of television, and 24.1 percent watched between two and three hours of television.

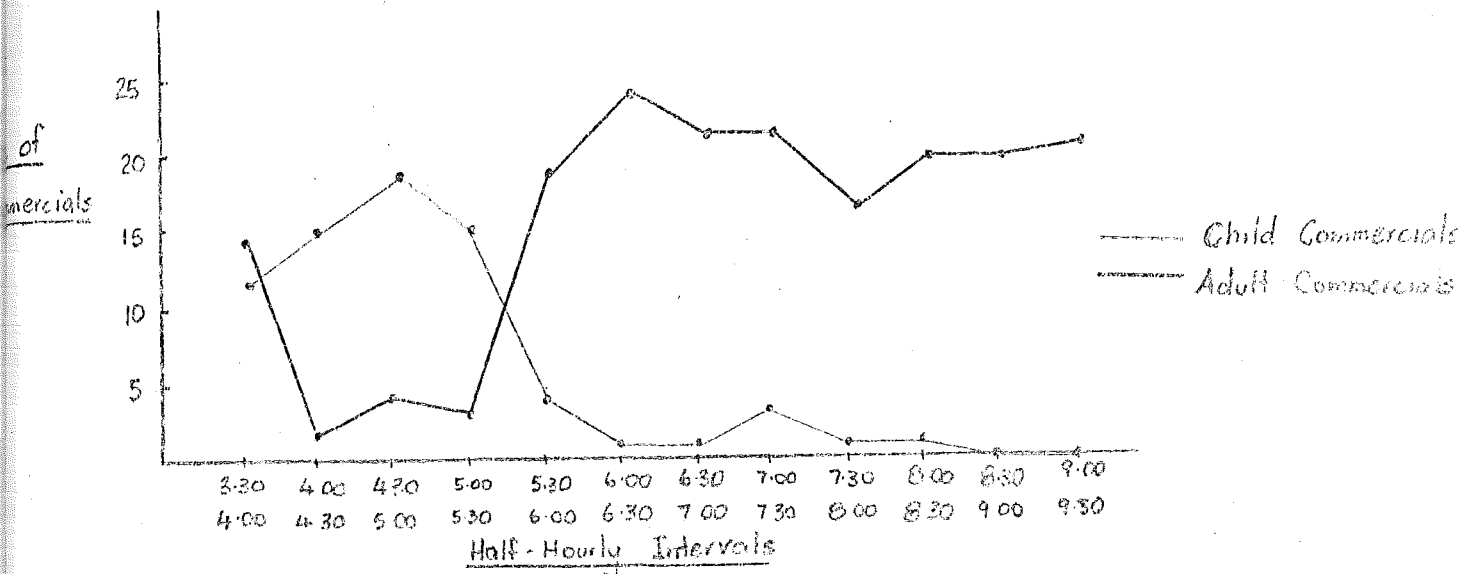
TABLE 15  
NUMBER OF CHILDREN WATCHING T.V. AT  
HALF-HOURLY INTERVALS



On the survey evening between 3.30pm and 9.30pm a total of 255 commercials were shown on both the commercial channels in Perth. Between 3.30pm and 5.00pm sixty nine percent of the commercials were judged to be childrens' commercials. Between 5.00pm and 6.30pm thirty percent of the commercials were judged to be childrens' commercials. Childrens' commercials were limited between 6.30pm and 8.00pm numbering only eight percent, and only registering two percent between 8.00pm and 9.30pm. (See table 16)

TABLE 16

NUMBER OF CHILDRENS' COMMERCIALS  
AND ADULT COMMERCIALS



Of the 255 commercials shown between 3.30pm and 9.30pm on the 31st October, 222 of them had a male voice as the main voice, 20 had a female voice, 12 had various voices and 1 had a child's voice. Does this indicate that males are more believable?

## LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Adler, Richard P.; and Others  
Research on the Effects of Television Advertising on Children: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Future Research.  
National Science Foundation, Washington D.C. 1977.
2. Atkin, Charles K.  
The Effects of Television Advertising on Children. (Report numbers 1,2,4,5 and 6)  
Michigan State Univ: Michigan, 1975
3. Atkin, Charles K.  
The Effects of Television Advertising on Children: Parent-Child Communication in Supermarket Breakfast Cereal Selection.  
Michigan State Univ: Michigan, 1975.
4. Atkin, Charles K.  
The Effects of Television Advertising on Children: Survey of Children's and Mother's Responses to Television Commercials.  
Michigan State Univ: Michigan, 1975.
5. Atkin, Charles K.  
Television Advertising and Childrens' Observational Modeling.  
(Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the International Communication Association.)  
Portland, Oregon. 1976.
6. Australian Broadcasting Control Board.  
Information Paper on Programme and Advertising Standards. Including Childrens' Television and Problems of Self Regulation.  
Canberra: Aust. Government Publishing Serv. 1977.

7. Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.  
Self-regulation for Broadcasters.  
Canberra: Aust. Government Publishing Service. 1977
8. Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.  
Television and the Public.  
Canberra: Australian Govern. Publishing Service, 1977
9. Barry, Thomas E.  
Childrens' Television Commercials: Importance of the Race Factor.  
(Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association)  
Chicago, 1975.
10. Ferguson Clara, P.  
Preadolescent Childrens' Attitudes Toward Television Commercials.  
University of Texas, Austin, 1975.
11. Gorn, Gerald J. and Goldberg, Marven E.  
Childrens' Reactions to Television Advertising for Toys.  
McGill University: Montreal. 1974
12. Haefner, James E. ; And Others.  
The Measurement of Advertising Impact on Children.  
(Paper presented at the 83rd Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association)  
University of Illionois ; Illinois, 1975
13. Larrick, Nancy.  
Hey, Mom, Who Put the Television in the Closet?  
(Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English)  
San Diego, California, 1975

14. Permut, Steven E.

Multivariate Approaches for  
Exploring the Evaluative or Deception in  
Television Advertising.

Urbana. Illinois, 1975.

NON-PRINT RESOURCES

1. Hawkins, Robert Dr.

Is Television Americanizing Australian  
Children?

(Audio-tape) Recorded at Churchlands College. 14-6-78

2. Hales. Alan.

The Effects of Commercials on Children.

( A guest speaker on Doug Foley's  
talk-back show on 6WF, September 1978.)