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Appeals in television advertising: A content analysis of commercials aimed at children and teenagers

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Abstract

A content analysis of 601 commercials was conducted in order to identify the appeals that characterize commercials aimed at children and teenagers. Our findings demonstrated that the use of appeals (a) showed strong age differences and (b) was highly gender-role stereotyped, particularly in commercials aimed at children. The most typical appeals in commercials aimed at male children were action-adventure, sports, and play, whereas commercials aimed at female children emphasized nurturing, physical attractiveness, friendship, and romance. Having the best, competition, and achievement were the dominant appeals in commercials aimed at male teenagers, whereas romance, sexuality, and belonging to a group were emphasized in commercials aimed at female teenagers.

Keywords: advertising, children, teenagers, content analysis, gender differences, gender-role stereotypes

Introduction

The bulk of research on children and advertising has focused on the effects of television advertising on children's cognition, attitudes, and behavior. A relatively small number of studies have concentrated on the *content* of advertising aimed at children. This paucity of content-analytic studies is remarkable in two respects. First, content analysis of advertising can provide a rich data source about the underlying assumptions of advertisers concerned with which content characteristics will attract specific audience groups. In other words, advertising content can be viewed as an *end product* that reflects advertisers' implicit or explicit hypotheses about the effectiveness of commercials aimed at different target groups. Second, content analysis of advertising is a valuable tool for predicting and understanding advertising effectiveness. Not only in advertising re-

search, but also in general media-effects research, it is widely understood that any effect of media content is enhanced or reduced by what the recipient makes of it. One important antecedent of the effectiveness of a persuasive message is the enjoyment triggered by its content. Content analysis of advertising can, therefore, be a useful instrument to improve our understanding of advertising effectiveness.

The aim of this study is to investigate advertisers' implicit or explicit hypotheses about how to reach boys and girls in different age groups. To this end, we have investigated the appeals that prevail in commercials aimed at different target groups. An appeal can be considered one of the most fundamental and concrete indicators of advertisers' underlying strategies to reach different audience groups. Additionally, an advertising appeal can be described as the persuasive strategy selected by the advertiser to make the product attractive to the consumer. It is the specific way in which a commercial relates to certain tastes and/or preferences of a target group.

There are two ways in which the use of proper appeals – that is appeals that suit the tastes and preferences of the target group – can enhance the effectiveness of commercials: via its influence on (a) consumers' brand attitudes and (b) their purchase intention. It has been repeatedly shown that both brand attitudes and purchase intention are largely determined by consumers' attitudes toward the commercial. When children like a commercial, the chance that they also like the brand and ask their parents to buy the brand is greatly enhanced (Derbaix and Bree, 1997; Moore and Lutz, 2000; Phelps and Hoy, 1996). It is evident, therefore, that the use of appeals that suit the tastes and preferences of children and teenagers can contribute greatly to advertising effectiveness.

To date four earlier studies using content analysis have investigated the use of appeals in advertising aimed at children (Atkin and Heald, 1977; Barcus, 1980; Kunkel and Gantz, 1992; Winick, Williamson, Chuzmir, and Winick, 1973). These studies concentrated on commercials aimed at children up to the age of 12. None of these studies investigated whether commercials aimed at children differed from those targeted at teenagers. Neither did they investigate possible differences between commercials aimed at male and female children and teenagers. In these earlier studies, four appeals often prevailed, namely happiness, fun, taste, and product performance. Other prominent appeals were action-adventure, sports, humor, peer-popularity, feelings of power, and feelings of being grown up.

The present study provides an extension of this earlier content-analytic research and improves on it in three respects. First, unlike earlier studies, our study compares the appeals that prevail in commercials aimed at

different age groups. Research on children's media preferences has shown that children's tastes and preferences change dramatically when they mature. For example, children in early childhood usually prefer familiar contexts and non-threatening fantasy animals, while children in middle childhood like to watch more adventurous and fast-paced media content and more complicated, socially oriented characters (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2000). Research has also shown that by the age of nine, children start to lose interest in toys and develop a preference for products with a social function, such as music and sports equipment (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2000). From this age on, they are interested primarily in media content designed for adults. Advertisers will undoubtedly use existing knowledge about age differences in children's preferences when designing commercials for specific age groups. Our study aims to reveal the strategies used by advertisers to reach children versus teenagers.

Second, unlike earlier research, we investigate gender differences in the use of appeals. Research into children's preferences has shown repeatedly that there are important differences between the way boys and girls think, how they express themselves, and what they like and dislike (Guber and Berry, 1993; Huston, 1983). Research has shown, for example, that boys more often than girls like action-oriented, adventurous and aggressive themes, whereas girls are interested more in relationship-centered and nurturing themes (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2000). One could expect that the appeals used in commercials targeted at boys and girls will reflect the gender differences that have been found in audience research on children's preferences of media content.

Finally, whereas earlier studies investigated only a limited number of appeals, we explore a more comprehensive range of appeals. The appeals we use are, in part, based on those employed in earlier studies to facilitate comparisons. However, to supplement the list of appeals that appeared in the earlier studies, we also draw upon empirical research into the media preferences of children and teenagers (e. g., Acuff and Reiher, 1997; Gunter, McAlleer, and Clifford, 1991; Howard, 1998; Mielke, 1983; McNeal, 1992; Sheldon and Loncar, 1996; Valkenburg and Janssen, 1999). With the use of these studies, we were able to identify 75 appeals that could potentially be used by advertisers to attract children and teenagers.

Research Question

Our content analysis investigates the appeals that advertisers use to persuade children and teenagers. This approach allows us to show the advertisers' underlying assumptions in attempting to reach different target

groups, and to make predictions about effectiveness of commercials aimed at different audience groups. Although we are primarily interested in commercials specifically aimed at male and female children and teenagers, we want to compare these commercials to those aimed at a general audience. We therefore also included commercials aimed at a general audience in our sample.

Although our data were collected in The Netherlands, we believe that our results will also apply to other Western societies. Children's consumer environments have become progressively universal in the past two decades. Children in different countries do not only play with the same toys (e. g., *Barbie*, *Nintendo*, *Lego*, *Action Man*), they also watch the same television programs (e. g., *Power Rangers*, *Pokémon*, *Digimon*, *Dragonball Z*) and they are interested in the same cereals, snacks, and soft drinks (e. g., *McDonald's* hamburgers, *Coca Cola*, *Lay's* chips, *M&M's*). In addition, an increasing number of commercials are made for the global market. Advertisers of products such as *Barbie*, *Nike*, and *Nintendo* design commercials that are broadcast all over the world. In The Netherlands, because advertisers assume that Dutch children understand the English language well enough and consider its use to be trendy, these commercials often are not dubbed (Gerritsen, Korzilius, van Meurs, and Gijsbers, 2000).

There has been, as yet, no attempt to compare commercials aimed at male and female children, teenagers, and a general audience. Since earlier research on this specific topic is too scarce to formulate specific hypotheses, we investigate the following research question:

Which appeals prevail in television commercials and how do these appeals vary in commercials aimed at male and female children and teenagers?

Method

Sample

Our objective was to collect an extensive and varied sample of advertisements that is representative of advertising that reaches Dutch children of different ages. In order to achieve this goal, we first ascertained the times when children and teenagers of different ages are most likely to watch television. For a period of three months (October 1998–January 1999) we then taped all the programs on two public and three commercial Dutch stations between 8am and 12am on Saturdays and between 4:30pm and 8:30pm on weekdays. In total, we taped 216 hours of television. All commercials that were broadcast during and around the recorded television programs were collected. This resulted in a sample of

approximately 2,500 commercials. After eliminating the repetitive commercials, public service-announcements, and non-commercial advertising, the final sample consisted of 601 different commercials.

Coding Procedure

Two coders were trained extensively over a two-month period. To practice the coding, the coders used a separate sub-sample of commercials that was not included in the analysis. Throughout the coding period, the functioning of the codebook and doubtful cases were regularly discussed. Each coder analyzed approximately 45% of the sample; 10% of the sample was analyzed by both coders in order to determine inter-coder reliabilities.

Measures

Advertising appeals. Our typology of appeals was based on earlier content-analysis studies on advertising appeals as well as on literature about children's and teenagers' tastes and preferences in regard to media content. Although this combination of content-analytic and survey studies yielded a more comprehensive list of appeals than earlier studies did, our list of appeals is not necessarily exhaustive.

The tastes and preferences that were identified in earlier survey-based literature had to be adapted for the content analysis. After all, the studies into tastes and preferences were designed with the purpose of revealing what is important to individuals, whereas our purpose was to establish how such tastes and preferences appear in commercials in the form of appeals. Our final codebook consisted of 75 appeals.¹ Each appeal was accompanied by an operational definition. Since many commercials in our sample contained more than one appeal, each appeal was coded as being present (1) or absent (0) in the commercial. The appeals were, therefore, not mutually exclusive.

Inter-coder agreement was perfect on the vast majority (88%) of the appeals that were identified in the study. Kappa's for these appeals were optimal (kappa = 1.0). For 7% of the appeals (i. e., family ties, financial security, and friendship), the reliability was good (kappa > .71). For only four of the remaining appeals (sexuality, being yourself, being pampered, and pampering oneself), the reliability was lower (.63 < kappa < .65). These four appeals were re-evaluated until consensus between the two coders was reached.

Target audience. In analyzing the content of commercials there are two accepted methods of defining the age and gender positioning of the commercial. One method derives the age and gender of the target audi-

ence from the *key characters* in the commercial (e. g., Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright, and Plehal, 1979; Winick et al., 1973). The other method is based on the *coder's estimation* of the target audience (e. g., Chandler and Griffiths, 2000). In this latter method, the coders consider both the nature of the advertised product and the gender and age of the key characters in the commercial. Because in our view it is implausible that advertisers would consistently use same-age and same-sex key characters in commercials to reach a specific target audience, we relied on the coder's estimation of the target audience.

We initially aimed to distinguish between commercials targeted at younger children (2–7 years), older children (8–12), teenagers (13–18), and a general audience. However, it proved to be impossible to distinguish reliably between commercials aimed at younger and older children. Therefore, we distinguished between the following age groups: 'specifically aimed at children' (2–12 years), 'specifically aimed at teenagers' (13–18-years), and 'aimed at a general audience'. The latter category included the remaining commercials, that is commercials which did not fit into the categories 'typically aimed at children' or 'typically aimed at teenagers'. Coders defined the gender positioning of the commercial as 'specifically aimed at males', 'specifically aimed at females', or 'aimed at both males and females'. Measures of inter-coder reliability were satisfactory. The kappa for the estimated target age was .94 and the kappa for the estimated target gender was 1.00, indicating that coders were reliably able to estimate the gender and age positioning of the commercial.

Results

Appeals in the Commercials

Our research question asked which appeals prevail in television commercials. The appeals used most often in the total sample were humor (53.2%), (product) quality (36.4%), and newness of the product (23.8%). Other frequent appeals were pleasant taste (19.8%), fun (16.3%), play (16%), action-adventure (14.8%), having the best (14.8%), saving money (13.1%), physical attractiveness (10.6%), seizing opportunities (10.6%), and convenience (10.1%).

Appeals in commercials aimed at different age groups. To investigate differences in the use of appeals in commercials aimed at different age groups, we compared the appeals used in commercials targeted at children to those targeted at teenagers and a general audience. Table 1 shows the frequency (in percentages) with which each appeal appeared in a commercial per targeted age group. The figures in bold indicate for

Table 1. Main differences in appeals in commercials aimed at different age groups.

Appeals	Commercials aimed at children (n=139) (%)	Commercials aimed at teenagers (n=126) (%)	Commercials aimed at general audience (n =336) (%)	χ^2	Cramer's \underline{V}
Play	57.6	5.6	2.7	233.49 ^a	.62 ^a
Action-adventure	38.8	15.9	4.5	92.29 ^a	.39 ^a
Being modern	2.2	18.3	1.2	59.32 ^a	.31 ^a
Being 'cool' (groovy, hip)	2.9	18.3	1.5	53.25 ^a	.30 ^a
Convenience	0	0.8	17.9	49.68 ^a	.29 ^a
Fun	30.2	20.6	8.9	34.84 ^a	.24 ^a
Financial security	0	0.8	11.0	28.36 ^a	.22 ^a
Health	2.2	0.8	11.6	22.93 ^a	.20 ^a
Courage	7.2	1.6	0.3	22.35 ^a	.19 ^a
Affection for animals	12.2	0	4.8	19.38 ^a	.18 ^a
Collecting	6.5	1.6	0.3	19.31 ^a	.18 ^a
Seizing opportunities	7.2	20.6	8.3	16.84 ^a	.17 ^a
Sexuality	0.7	13.5	10.7	15.97 ^a	.16 ^a
Tidiness	0.7	0	6.5	15.42 ^a	.16 ^a
Nurturing	8.6	0	3.0	14.98 ^b	.16 ^b
Creativity	6.5	0.8	1.2	13.72 ^b	.15 ^b
Love	0.7	0.8	6.5	12.97 ^b	.15 ^b
Individuality	0	9.5	5.7	12.64 ^b	.15 ^b
Physical attractiveness	6.5	4.8	14.6	12.60 ^b	.15 ^b
Personal freedom	0.7	11.1	7.4	12.24 ^b	.14 ^b
Having the best	7.9	23.0	14.6	11.98 ^b	.14 ^b
Belonging to a group	1.4	9.5	3.6	11.49 ^b	.14 ^b
Affection for children	9.4	0	7.7	11.49 ^b	.14 ^b
Competition	8.6	4.0	2.1	11.00 ^b	.14 ^b
Families	5.0	0	7.7	10.65 ^b	.13 ^b
Having natural, organic, food and clothing	0	0	3.9	10.48 ^b	.13 ^b
Capability	2.2	0	0	10.02 ^b	.13 ^b
Self-esteem	0	0	3.3	8.84 ^c	.12 ^c
Energy	1.4	5.6	1.2	8.70 ^c	.12 ^c
Enjoyment	1.4	6.3	8.0	7.42 ^c	.11 ^c
Career	0	0	2.4	6.40 ^c	.10 ^c

Note:^ap < .001; ^bp < .01; ^cp < .05

which age group the particular appeal had the most occurrences. For example, the appeal 'play' appeared most often in commercials aimed at children, 'having the best' appeared most often in commercials aimed at teenagers and 'convenience' appeared most often in adult commercials. Only those appeals that differed significantly by target age group are reported in Table 1 (df = 2, $\chi^2 < 5.99$, p < .05). Cramer's \underline{V} scores were computed in order to assess the strength of the relationship between age group and occurrences of the appeal. The appeals in Table 1 are listed in order of the strength of the relationship. The five appeals that differed

most significantly among the three age groups were play, action-adventure, being modern, being cool, and convenience.

Commercials aimed at children (2–12 years) significantly more often used the appeals play (57.6%), action-adventure (38.8%), fun (30.2%), courage (7.2%), affection for animals (12.2%), and collecting (6.5%). Other appeals that were used more often in commercials for children than in commercials aimed at the other two age groups were nurturing, creativity, affection for children, competition, family ties, and capability. Post hoc chi-square tests revealed that the frequency of the fun-appeal significantly differed from commercials aimed at adults, but not from commercials aimed at teenagers, while affection for children and family ties only differed significantly from commercials aimed at teenagers.

Commercials aimed at teenagers were significantly more likely to use being modern (18.3%), being cool (18.3%), seizing opportunities (20.6%), having the best (23.0%), belonging to a group (9.5%), and energy (5.6%). The appeals of sexuality, individuality, personal freedom, and enjoyment were significantly more often detected in commercials for teenagers than in commercials for children, but did not differ significantly from commercials aimed at a general audience.

Appeals that were more often used in commercials aimed at a general audience were convenience (17.9%), financial security (11.0%), health (11.6%), tidiness (6.5%), love (6.5%), physical attractiveness (14.6%), having natural, organic food and clothing (3.9%), self-esteem (3.3%) and career (2.4%). Affection for children and family ties were more often used in both commercials for adults and children than in commercials for teenagers. Sexuality, individuality, personal freedom, and enjoyment were more often used in both commercials for adults and teenagers than in commercials for children.

Appeals in commercials aimed at different gender groups. In order to investigate the differences between commercials aimed at different gender groups, we selected only the commercials that were coded as ‘specifically aimed at males’ or ‘specifically aimed at females’. The commercials that were coded as ‘aimed at both males and females’ were dropped from this part of the analysis. We analyzed the remaining 183 commercials (30% of the sample) to compare the use of appeals in commercials targeted at males to those targeted at females. Of all commercials targeted at children, 27% were aimed at boys and 22% at girls. With respect to the commercials for teenagers, 9% were aimed at males and 7% at females, while among commercials for a general audience, only 4% were exclusively aimed at males and 24% at females. The low numbers in the cells representing commercials at male and female teenagers affected the significance levels of the chi-square tests. Because our pur-

Table 2. Main differences in appeals in commercials aimed at different gender groups.

Commercials aimed at children				
Appeals	Aimed at boys ($n=37$) (%)	Aimed at girls ($n=31$) (%)	χ^2	\underline{V}
Action-adventure	75.7	12.9	26.68 ^a	.63 ^a
Nurturing	0	32.3	13.99 ^a	.54 ^a
Physical attractiveness	0	22.6	9.31 ^b	.37 ^b
Friendship	0	19.4	7.85 ^b	.34 ^b
Affection for animals	0	16.1	6.44 ^c	.31 ^c
Romance	2.7	19.4	5.07 ^c	.27 ^c
Affection for children	2.7	19.4	5.07 ^c	.27 ^c
Sports	13.5	0	4.52	.26 ^c
Play	83.8	61.3	4.39	.25 ^c
Commercials aimed at teenagers				
	Aimed at boys ($n=11$) (%)	Aimed at girls ($n=9$) (%)	χ^2	\underline{V}
Having the best	27.3	0	2.89	.38
Competition	27.3	0	2.89	.38
Newness	0	22.2	2.72	.37
Romance	0	22.2	2.72	.37
Sexuality	9.1	33.3	1.82	.30
Sports	18.2	0	1.82	.30
Belonging to group	9.1	33.3	1.82	.30
Achievement	18.2	0	1.82	.30
Commercials aimed at general audience				
	Aimed at boys ($n=14$) (%)	Aimed at girls ($n=81$) (%)	χ^2	\underline{V}
Safety	14.3	0	11.82 ^c	.35 ^b
Belonging to a group	14.3	1.2	6.65	.27 ^c
Friendship	21.4	3.7	6.34 ^b	.26 ^c
Action-adventure	14.3	2.5	4.13	.21 ^c
Seizing opportunities	14.3	2.5	4.13	.21 ^c
Pleasant taste	0	18.5	3.08	.18
Tidiness	0	18.5	3.08	.18
Health	0	17.3	2.84	.17

Note: ^a $p < .001$; ^b $p < .01$; ^c $p < .05$

pose was to examine the main differences between commercials aimed at males and females, we reported the appeals with the highest chi-squares in each subgroup, although some of these differences were not statistically significant. Table 2 provides the results of the analysis of gender

differences and reports the most substantial gender differences in the use of appeals within each age group.

In commercials aimed at children, a number of important differences emerged between boys' and girls' commercials. Commercials aimed at boys more often made use of action-adventure (75.7%), sports (13.5%), and play (83.8%). Commercials aimed at girls more often used nurturing (32.3%), physical attractiveness (22.6%), friendship (19.4%), affection for animals (16.1%), romance (19.4%), and affection for children (19.4%). Table 2 shows that many appeals were exclusively used for either boys or girls. For example, whereas nurturing, physical attractiveness, friendship and affection for animals were highly prevalent in commercials for girls, these appeals did not show up at all in commercials for boys.

Appeals that were significantly more often used in commercials aimed at male teenagers were having the best (27.3%), competition (27.3%), sports (18.2%), and achievement (18.2%). Commercials for female teenagers more often used newness (22.2%), romance (22.2%), sexuality (33.3%), and belonging to a group (33.3%). While none of these differences reach the traditional levels of statistical significance, there are, nonetheless, substantial differences. Newness, romance, and sexuality never appeared in commercials aimed at teenage boys, while having the best and competition never appeared in commercials aimed at teenage girls.

Appeals that were more often detected in commercials for a male general audience were safety (14.3%), belonging to a group (14.3%), friendship (21.4%), action-adventure (14.3%), and seizing opportunities (14.3%). Commercials aimed at a female general audience were more likely to use pleasant taste (18.5%), tidiness (18.5%) and health (17.3%).

Appeals in Different Product Categories

Although our results show that certain appeals are related to age and gender groups, it is possible that the use of appeals is related to certain product categories, which are in turn related to certain target groups. Table 3 shows how specific appeals differ for the most important product categories. In addition, Table 4 shows how these product categories are marketed to each of the three age groups.

Table 3 clearly shows that some appeals seem to be generic in the sense that they are used for all product categories. For example humor, quality, fun, and newness prevail in every product category. In contrast, appeals such as play, pleasant taste, health, and safety seem to be more specifically associated with toys, food products, personal care products, and cars, respectively. Table 4 shows that certain product categories are more often advertised to specific age groups. For example, more than 70% of commercials aimed at children are commercials for toys and

Table 3. *Prevailing appeals in commercials for the most frequently advertised product.*

Toys and games ($n=102$)		Music and video ($n=78$)		Personal care products ($n=71$)	
	%		%		%
1. Play	81.2	1. Quality	51.3	1. Attractiveness	61.1
2. Action-adventure	48.5	2. Having the best	41.0	2. Humor	47.2
3. Humor	46.5	3. Humor	30.8	3. Newness	37.5
4. Quality	45.5	4. Newness	30.8	4. Health	31.9
5. Newness	20.8	5. Fun	23.1	5. Quality	31.9
Household products ($n=57$)		Candy and snacks ($n=47$)		Non-alcoholic drinks ($n=43$)	
	%		%		%
1. Quality	62.7	1. Pleasant taste	88.6	1. Humor	83.7
2. Humor	39.2	2. Humor	85.7	2. Pleasant taste	34.9
3. Newness	31.4	3. Newness	31.4	3. Energy	20.9
4. Convenience	29.4	4. Fun	17.1	4. Newness	20.9
5. Saving money	21.6	5. Action-adventure	14.3	5. Fun/ quality	18.9
Media and entertainment ($n=40$)		Foods ($n=30$)		Cars ($n=22$)	
	%		%		%
1. Quality	45.0	1. Humor	82.5	1. Humor	59.1
2. Humor	37.5	2. Taste	82.5	2. Newness	40.9
3. Fun	30.0	3. Quality	27.5	3. Quality	40.9
4. Newness	25.0	4. Newness	22.5	4. Safety	22.7
5. Saving money	22.5	5. Health	22.5	5. Convenience	18.2

Table 4. *Most frequently advertised product categories in different age groups.*

Children ($n=139$)		Teenagers ($n=126$)		General audience ($n=336$)	
	%		%		%
1. Toys and Games	58.3	1. Music and video	31.7	1. Personal care products	17.0
2. Candies and snacks	12.2	2. Media and entertainment	16.7	2. Household products	14.3
3. Music and video	12.2	3. Toys and games	12.7	3. Other	11.6
4. Non-alcoholic drinks	5.8	4. Non-alcoholic drinks	11.9	4. Foods	6.5
5. Foods	5.0	5. Personal care products	9.5	5. Cars	6.5

candy. It is through these commercials for toys and candy that children are confronted with specific child-related appeals, such as play, fun, action-adventure, and humor.

Discussion

Our content-analysis results provide a clear impression of advertisers' assumptions about children's likes and dislikes. According to advertisers, children do *not* like to be addressed with appeals such as convenience,

financial security, sexuality, tidiness, individuality, personal freedom, and career. Advertisers use a number of very specific appeals to attract children. The five appeals that were used most often in children's commercials were: (1) play, (2) action-adventure, (3) fun, (4) affection for animals, and (5) affection for children. These appeals are transmitted mainly via commercials for toys and candies, which comprised more than 70% of the commercials aimed at children.

Two of the top-five appeals, play and fun, were prevalent in commercials targeted at both genders. The use of play and fun in commercials for both males and females is conceivable, given that these appeals directly speak to two of the most fundamental needs of boys and girls (McNeal, 1992; Acuff and Reiher, 1997). Other, less common, appeals that were found in commercials aimed at both boys and girls were creativity and collecting. This is also supported by empirical findings pertaining to children's tastes and preferences. Although the content of children's creative play or tasks can vary greatly between boys and girls, there is no evidence that gender is predictive of children's need for creativity (Baer, 1999). The same argument holds for children's preference for collecting. By the age of seven or eight, children develop a strong preference for collecting, comparing, and swapping objects and products, such as marbles or trading cards (Acuff and Reiher, 1997). Although it has been observed that boys may show a slightly stronger preference for collecting, collecting is typical for both boys and girls.

Of the five most common appeals in commercials aimed at children, one appeal specifically applied to boys' commercials and two appeals specifically applied to girls' commercials. Action-adventure was more common in boys' commercials, whereas affection for animals and affection for children were exclusively used in girls' commercials. A number of less common appeals also differed in commercials aimed at boys versus girls. Girls' commercials were characterized by stereotypically female appeals, such as physical attractiveness, friendship, affection for animals, and romance. Boys' commercials, on the other hand, were dominated by stereotypically male appeals, such as sports and competition.

Our results are consistent with content analyses on the depiction of sex-role stereotypes in commercials, which have often found that advertisers use highly stereotypical means to attract the attention of boys and girls (Allan and Coltrane, 1996; Browne, 1998; Chandler and Griffiths, 2000). Some of these researchers have raised the concern that television advertising imposes or reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. They argue that exposure to commercials that are sex-typed in style and content may help to establish gendered preferences for particular products and program traits (Chandler and Griffiths, 2000).

The question whether the causal direction of the relationship between stereotyped advertising and stereotypical attitudes of children points from the media to the child, still remains unanswered. Research shows that the tastes of boys and girls in early and middle childhood are highly gender-role stereotyped (Acuff and Reiher, 1997; Huston, 1983). By the age of six, most children appear to hold very rigid and mutually exclusive sets of beliefs about what the sexes can or cannot do (Huston, 1983; Ullian, 1977). It has been argued that these attitudes may be a matter of cognitive and emotional development. Children of a certain age may actively *need* media content that represents the world in terms of binary oppositions between male and female, a presentation that adults might consider to be highly stereotypical (Buckingham, 2000). It is possible that these children select stereotypical media content. It is also conceivable that advertisers take the stereotypical preferences of children into account when designing commercials for this age group.

Our results also clearly reveal advertisers' assumptions of teenagers' needs and preferences. According to advertisers, teenagers do *not* like to be addressed with appeals such as financial security, health, affection for animals, tidiness, nurturing, affection for children, and family ties. Advertisers most often approached teenagers with the appeals of (1) having the best, (2) fun, (3) seizing opportunities, (4) being modern, and (5) being 'cool.' Other appeals that advertisers use in commercials aimed at teenagers are belonging to a group, freedom, energy, and sexuality. These appeals correspond closely to important teenage values such as social identity, sexuality, rebelliousness, and being accepted by peers (Muuss, Velder and Porton, 1996; Zollo, 1999). Like commercials aimed at children, teenagers' commercials showed marked gender differences. Competition, 'having the best', sports and achievement characterized commercials aimed at male teenagers. Commercials aimed at female teenagers more often appealed to 'belonging to a group,' sexuality, newness, and romance.

The differential use of these appeals is highly consistent with the needs and preferences of teenage boys and girls (Muuss et al., 1996; Zollo, 1999). Research has shown that male and female children and teenagers seem to follow a different developmental path with respect to gender-stereotyped preferences. Boys tend to have greater resistance to opposite-sex activities than girls and tend to display increasing preferences for masculine activities throughout childhood. Girls, on the other hand, tend to move away from feminine preferences during middle childhood (Durkin, 1997). These differences between boys and girls might explain why traditional feminine appeals such as affection for animals and children, nurturing, and physical attractiveness hardly show up in commercials aimed at teenagers. It is probably more lucrative for advertisers

to use traditional masculine appeals in commercials aimed at teenagers because they will attract both male and female teenagers.

We included commercials aimed at a general audience in our sample in order to demonstrate how commercials aimed at children and teenagers differ from commercials aimed at a general audience. Our findings show that commercials aimed at children and teenagers are in fact very different from commercials aimed at a general audience. For example, commercials aimed at a general audience commonly made use of conventional appeals such as financial security, health, and convenience. This result confirms the idea that advertisers consider children and teenagers as separate niche markets.

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Notes

1. The 75 appeals that were investigated in the total sample ($N = 601$) of commercials were (in descending order of frequency in the total sample): Humor, quality, newness, pleasant taste, fun, play, action-adventure, having the best, saving money, physical attractiveness, seizing opportunities, convenience, sexuality, romance, uniqueness, health, personal freedom, affection for children, financial security, enjoyment, friendship, family ties, affection for animals, being 'cool' (groovy, hip), sports, individuality, being modern, pampering oneself, belonging to a group, love, competition, happiness, tidiness, nurturing, achievement, relaxation, beauty, nostalgia, being yourself, being natural, education, creativity, discovering the world, pampering others, being special (to someone), luxury, energy, having natural, organic food and clothing, courage, collecting, self-esteem, rebelliousness, feeling at home, safety, satisfying hunger or thirst, career, youth, higher quality of life, recreation, love of nature, power, love of art and culture, better world (free of war and conflict), being pampered, wisdom, saving time, higher standard of living, capability, prestige, being socially accepted, equality, self-knowledge, patriotism, being obedient, political freedom, religiosity.

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