

## Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising

CHAN, Kara K W

*Published in:*  
Journal of Marketing Communications

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/135272600345543](https://doi.org/10.1080/135272600345543)

Published: 01/01/2000

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
CHAN, K. K. W. (2000). Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 6(1), 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135272600345543>

### General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent publication URLs

## **Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising**

Keywords: television advertising--Hong Kong--children

Dr. Kara Chan  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Communication Studies  
Hong Kong Baptist University  
Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

Fax: (852) 2339-7890  
Telephone: (852) 2339-7836  
E-mail: karachan@hkbu.edu.hk

Paper being accepted by *Journal of Marketing Communications*

Dr. Kara K.W. Chan is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University. She worked in the advertising and public relations profession and as a statistician for the Hong Kong Government. She now actively involves in research on Hong Kong and China's mass communication, advertising, consumer behaviour and environmental studies. She has published at the *International Journal of Advertising*, *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Gazette* and the *Environmentalist*.

This project is funded by the Faculty research grant of Hong Kong Baptist University.

Running head: Advertising and children  
October 30, 1998  
R05child\paper1.doc

**Hong Kong children's  
understanding of television advertising**

**keywords: children, television advertising, cognitive development**

Abstract

This study examines Chinese children's understanding and comprehension of television advertising. A quota sample of four hundred and forty-eight children, 32 girls and 32 boys from kindergartens, grade 1 to six, were personal-interviewed in May 1998. Results indicated that children from grade two (aged seven to eight) began to know what advertising was and were aware of the persuasive intention of television advertising. Over one third of older children from grade four understood that television stations carried advertising for money. Like children in the West, the main reason for liking and disliking of commercial depended on its entertainment element. Understanding of television advertising, recall of brands from slogans and comprehension of advertising content were consistently related to cognitive development of children. Brand recognition from liked and disliked commercials was strong. Comprehension of key messages of advertising content varied greatly by children's cognitive development and the style of presentation. Ethical issue and public opinion of Hong Kong consumers regarding to advertising to children were discussed.

(166 words)

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising today penetrates into the life of every person, including children. The children's market is important to advertisers because of the enormous purchasing power of the children and their parents. A survey of 2,400 children aged 7 to 12 in six countries, including China, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States, indicated that their estimated annual spending power ranged from 1.7 billion US dollars for Germany to 11.3 billion US dollars for United States. Survey results also indicated active participation from children in making family purchase decisions in a number of product categories (Carey, Zhao, Chiaramonte and Eden, 1997). The newly emerging middle classes, high populations and one-child policies in some Asian countries mean that these 'little emperors' are giving more and more influence over where the family dollar is spent. Research has suggested that children in China have been quick to make demands and exercise pester power. They are often the first to learn of new products from friends or from television and introduce these products to the household (AC Nielsen, 1997).

Children in Hong Kong are exposed to a large amount of advertising, especially through television advertising. According to a weekly AC Nielsen's television rating report, the average rating of TVB-Jade, the dominant Chinese channel, from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. on a school day in March 1998 for children 4 to 14 was 12 rating points (equivalent to an audience size of 103,000). Children watched a lot more television during school holidays. The average rating of TVB-Jade on an Easter holiday was 17 rating points (40 percent more audience than a typical school day). A child spending four hours per day watching television may be exposed to 15,000 commercials every year. What do children in Hong Kong know about television advertising and what do they learn from it? This study attempts to examine children's response to television advertising on aspects relating to the communication

process. The study adopts Piaget's (1970) theory of cognitive development. The theory identifies distinct stages of cognitive development and postulates that children would manifest differences in the ways they select, evaluate, and use information. Children's responses to television advertising will therefore be analyzed by school year.

The study is of major interest to both marketers and to public policy officials. Marketers are keen to know if their advertising is effective while policy makers are concerned with protecting the interests of the child. The study is particularly important as there is a paucity of empirical evidence on the topic within the context of children from Asian cultures. This is surprising at a time when marketing academics make continuous pleas for international studies on marketing concepts and consumer behaviors (Bradley, 1987; Lee and Green, 1991). As Mainland China is adopting a 'one-child' family planning policy, the children have become the focus of the attention of the parents and grandparents. Children are believed to exert an even greater influence on the family's purchase decisions. The study will serve as a benchmark study for Hong Kong as well as a protocol for future studies in China.

The objectives of this study are:

- a) to study children's ability to understand the purpose of television advertising;
- b) to examine children's attention, recall and comprehension of television advertising;
- c) to investigate children's liking and disliking of television advertising, and
- d) to investigate whether the above are related to stages of cognitive development.

The preceding literature review indicates that children's responses to television advertising in Western societies consistently depend on age or school year of the respondents. This study will provide empirical data for comparison with an Eastern society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Western perspectives of child development, Piaget's (1970) theory of cognitive development has had great impact on research related to the communication process of advertising to children. The theory proposes that a child's ability to think and to reason progresses through a series of distinct stages. Each stage has its own unique characterization, yet could vary considerably depending on intelligence, cultural background and social economic factors. Piaget's (1970) proposes four stages of cognitive development that can be summarized as follows:

- the sensori-motor stage (0 to 2 years): the behaviour is primarily motor and the child does not manifest conceptual thinking.
- the pre-operational stage (2 to 7 years): the child's thinking about objects and ideas is poorly organized and only dominant features are used for making judgements.
- the concrete operations stage (7 to 11 years): the child can think conceptually and organize ideas in a coherent and stable manner.
- the formal operations stage (11+ years): the child can think in abstract terms.

Many studies on children's communication process of television advertising have been based on Piaget's cognitive development theory. Other approaches have also emerged to provide detailed explanation of Piaget's theory using concepts about information processing of short-term and long-term memory of commercial information (Roedder, 1981).

Studies generally have indicated that children's ability to distinguish programs from commercials increased with age (Meringoff and Lesser, 1980; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974) and location of the commercial relative to the program (Hoy, Young and Mowen, 1986).

Children's comprehension of television advertising and its persuasive intent also increased with age (Blosser and Roberts, 1985; Levin, Petros and Petrella, 1982; Rubin, 1974; Wackman, Wartella and Ward, 1977; Ward, 1972;). In a British survey, 80 percent of the children replied that the main reason for television advertising was because 'the advertisers want to sell you something'. The response did not differ by age or by social class, but they differed by sex. Girls were more likely to know the purpose of advertising than boys (Greenberg, Fazal and Wober, 1986). Research also suggests that by the age of nine, children showed marked improvement in understanding ambiguous wording, humour and imagery found in advertisements (Belk, Mayer and Driscoll, 1984; Brown and Bryant, 1983; Nippold, Cuyler and Braunbeck-Price, 1988).

Decreased attention during commercials and selective viewing of commercials with age has been found in many studies (Sheikh, Prasad and Rao, 1974; Ward, 1972; Ward, Levingson and Wackman, 1972; Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson, 1978). Attention to TV commercials depended on personal factors and stimulus factors. Personal factors include parental and peer influence, the level of motivation and attitudes toward commercials. Stimulus factors include the nature of the TV program, the content of the commercial and the product advertised (McNeal, 1987).

Other children also believed that advertising was less truthful (Gaineo and Easserman, 1981; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974; Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977). All these observations are generally attributed to greater cognitive maturity and increased experience with the medium. Van Evra (1995) argued that children become less likely to be persuaded with age because they use other sources for the information they need and depend less on television advertising. The commercials therefore become less personally relevant to the child.

Several studies have reported that children, even the younger ones, were able to encode and subsequently remember commercials in terms of their component attributes such as premiums, product symbols and brand names (Gianinno and Zuckerman, 1977; Rubin, 1972; Shrimp, Dyer and Divita, 1976). Children recalled premium offers more than attributes of a product, and premium played an important role with younger children in choosing a product (Comstock and Paik, 1991).

From the advertisers' perspective, a successful marketing communication campaign has to be a memorable one because the opportunity to buy a product following its appearance in mass media is usually delayed. Therefore, it is important to know whether the viewers understand the message communication through the advertising and what information is stored and subsequently retrieved from the memory about the advertised brands (Gunter and McAleer, 1997).

Most of the research literature on advertising and children is based on research conducted in Western societies, and there are very few comparable studies from Asian countries. When referring to Chinese perspectives toward child development, Confucianism is one Chinese ideology that has been widely investigated by Chinese and Western researchers. Some important characteristics include an emphasis on moralistic orientation toward children (Ekblad, 1986); filial piety (Hsu, 1981; Kelly and Tseng, 1992); self-fulfillment (Kelly and Tseng, 1992; Suzuki, 1980); good manners, and the importance of education (Chiu, 1987; Ekblad, 1986; Ho, 1989). The implications of all these studies suggests that Chinese parents tend to be more concerned about the moral behaviours in the commercials, and they will exert more control over their children's behaviours.

To conclude, the review of literature shows that understanding the purpose of television advertising and comprehension of advertising content depend on age or school year of the



children. Children in Asian societies are more likely to pay attention to the moral behaviours in the advertising content.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Six advertising and public relations undergraduate students of Hong Kong Baptist University were recruited and, through personal sources, interviewed four hundred and forty-eight Chinese children from five to twelve years old in Hong Kong. The children were from a quota sample of equal number of boys and girls for each school year from kindergarten and grade one to grade six. Interviewers were trained on the purpose of the study, the structure of the interview and the skills in soliciting responses. Interviews were conducted at public libraries, churches, restaurants and parks near school areas in May 1998. Each interview took about twenty minutes. Efforts were made to minimize interruptions and intrusions by other family members or friends present. The interviews started with open-ended questions about what advertising is, the purpose of television advertising, which commercials they like and dislike and their reasons. Respondents were asked to recall the brands that used specific slogans. Three slogans were taken from three food commercials. The interviewers then presented storyboards of four commercials that were telecast in prime times (7 to 10 p.m.) during the month before the interviews were conducted. The four commercials were selected to represent products that could be easily understood by children (such as chocolate and tea), products that were difficult to understand (taxi using gas fuel) and government's pro-social messages (a public service announcement about equal right among females and males). These commercials were selected from a pool of about 100 commercials broadcast in prime time programmes on two Chinese channels a month before the conduction of the interviews. The author and one faculty member of the Department of Communication Studies selected eight commercials of different product categories. They were then tested by personal

interview with five children on their understanding using open-ended questions. The most and the least easily understood ones were selected. Two other commercials with medium comprehension responses were selected. Respondents were required to tell what were being said in the commercials. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were coded by a research assistant and were cross checked by the author. A coding menu was prepared for closed-ended questions. For open-ended questions, a coding menu was developed after reviewing all the responses.

## FINDINGS

### *Understanding of television advertising*

Children were prompted about their awareness and knowledge about television advertising. The interviewer mentioned that ‘when we are watching television, sometimes the program stops and there are other messages coming up’. Children were asked what these are, what are their purposes and why the television stations carry such messages. Table 1 to Table 3 summarize their responses. Results of the three tables consistently showed a sharp increase in awareness of advertising, understanding of the selling intent, and programme sponsorship from grade two onward. The second grade (or equivalent to age eight) was found to be an important watershed. Younger children below the second grade had difficulty verbalizing what constituted a commercial. Starting from the second grade, over half of the children knew that commercials helped to promote products. A small percentage of the respondents could spontaneously recognize the selling intent of the commercials. In response to the question ‘what do commercials want you to do’, a much higher number of younger children showed recognition of the selling intent of commercials. In response to the question ‘why television stations carry such messages’, less than one quarter of the respondents were able to identify the fact that advertising paid for free programming. A higher proportion of

children from grade four knew the institutional function of television advertising. Close to half of the children at grade six (aged eleven to twelve) understood that the television station broadcast commercials for money. Some children viewed television advertising as part of the entertainment offered by the television station. They thought that TV stations broadcast commercials in order to test whether the commercials were funny and to attract audiences. While understanding the purpose of advertising generally increased with school year (or age), children in grade five and six were no better than the children in grade three and four on all three questions.

[TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE ]

[TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE ]

[TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE ]

#### *Liked and disliked commercials*

Children were asked to recall their favourite TV commercials and the commercial they disliked the most. Not all children were able to mention commercials that they liked or disliked. Older children were more likely to talk about commercials they liked and disliked. Altogether 222 and 115 commercials were mentioned as the most favourite and the most disliked commercials respectively. Children were more ready to recall liked than disliked commercials. This may indicate that children are less critical about television advertising. Table 4 summarizes product categories of commercials cited as most liked by children.

[TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE ]

Results indicated that food and drink, toys and mobile phone commercials were most frequently cited as commercials they liked. These three product categories accounted for

nearly eighty percent of the total number of recalls. Older children (fifth and sixth graders) lost interest in toy commercials and developed a marked appreciation for mobile phone and sports goods commercials. Table 5 summarizes the reasons for liking of commercials.

Children said they liked these commercials because the commercials were interesting and funny, they liked the products, or they liked the celebrities used. Older children liked commercials using celebrities. This accounted for their high appreciation of mobile phone commercials that used movie stars and pop singers as endorsers. Over half of the respondents at all school years mentioned funny and interesting as their reasons for liking those commercials. Many children cited McDonalds, Kinder chocolate and Yakult drink commercials as their favourite commercials because the story lines were cute and entertaining. Children liked commercials with cartoon figures, funny story or their favourite movie/TV stars. In responding to this question, younger children were particularly prone to confuse these commercials with the products. For example, children said they liked programme announcement because they liked to watch that particular programme.

[TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE ]

Table 6 summarizes product categories of 116 most disliked commercials. Mobile phones, food and drink commercials, public service announcements, and supermarket commercials were most frequently cited. These four categories accounted for fifty-five percent of the total number of recalls. Table 7 summarizes the reasons for disliking these commercials. The children disliked these commercials because they did not understand them, they found them boring or horrifying, or they disliked the products (especially for liquor and female personal products). Respondents found some public service announcement advertisements terrifying. For example, an anti-drug commercial featuring distorted images after a young man taking drugs, a commercial featuring a television set dropped from a high

level that landed on and hurt a group of children playing, and a commercial about a fire in the household.

Some children disliked commercials that were exaggerated and false. Some children did not like certain commercials because of ‘incorrect’ behaviours. For example, a nine-year old girl said she did not like any beer commercials because they contained pornography. An eleven years old girl did not like a Yakult drink commercial featuring a young boy showing passion for a little girl because ‘love affairs is no good at that age’. Children also learned that anti-social behaviours, such as shoplifting and driving under the influence of alcohol, were not acceptable from the public service announcements. This indicates that children are able to evaluate television advertising in the light of normative lessons learned elsewhere. Older children criticized certain commercials for the use of celebrities that they did not like. An interesting observation was that celebrities polarized reactions from fans and non-fans. For example, many children who liked the mobile phone commercial featuring pop singer Leon Lai disliked another mobile phone commercial featuring singer Aaron Kwok.

[TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE ]

[TABLE SEVEN ABOUT HERE ]

For the 222 most liked commercials, a majority of respondents (85 percent) spontaneously recalled the brand names. But for the 115 most disliked commercials, nearly sixty percent mentioned the brand names. Results indicated that brand recognition was much stronger for brands liked, than disliked.

[TABLE SEVEN ABOUT HERE ]

*Recall of brand names from slogans*

Children were prompted to recall brand names for three slogans and the results were summarized in Table 8. The first slogan was for the Kinder chocolate commercials targeted at mothers with young children. The second slogan was for the Nestle milk powder commercials targeted at children aged seven to twelve. The slogan has been used for nearly fourteen years. The third slogan was for the Maltesers chocolate commercial targeted at youngsters. Results indicated that the overall brand recall ranged from 18 to 32 percent. Chi-square analysis examined whether recall and comprehension of television advertising relate to school year. All chi-square values were significant, indicating that comprehension was consistently related to school year or age. Children in kindergartens and first graders performed poorly while second and third graders performed very well. A small proportion of respondents recalled either an alternate brand or a different product category. The target audiences of the commercials performed better than other groups. This suggests that children learn more from commercials that use models from their age groups.

[TABLE EIGHT ABOUT HERE ]

#### *Comprehension of television advertising*

Children were presented with storyboards of four selected commercials and they were asked to explain what the commercials said. Results in Table 9 indicated that there was a significant difference in respondents' comprehension of television advertising. The overall proportion of children who could give the key messages ranged from 27 percent to 63 percent. All chi-square values were found significant, indicating that comprehension was consistently related to school year or age. Children in kindergartens and grade one found difficulty in identifying key messages. They seemed to be preoccupied with what a commercial should tell or what they were interested to know. In both the chocolate and tea commercials, a lot of children mentioned that the commercial was about the good taste (coded as partial/wrong understanding). They failed to recognize that there were a variety of

selling points for food. Children's comprehension was clearly limited by personal experience. The commercial about taxi using gas fuel caused the most confusion, because driving was unfamiliar to them. Many children mixed up public service announcements advocating similar issues, including the use of unleaded fuel or turning off the engine when the car stopped. Surprisingly, pro-social messages communicated well even to younger children when they were presented in a 'children-friendly' way. The public service announcement on 'human right' gave some specificity to the idea of equal rights in an animated form featuring animated boy and girl characters. After a voice-over that everyone had the right to choose his or her occupation, the girl said that she wanted to be a doctor. The boy rejected her idea and the voice over asserted equal rights. The commercial provided a concrete example of what a violation of right represents.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The result on children's cognitive response to television advertising obtained in this study was similar to previous studies. Grade-related or age-related changes in understanding were consistently found. A remarkable increase in understanding what advertising is, and the purpose of television advertising at grade two (aged seven to eight) was also consistent with Piaget's (1970) proposed stage on concrete operations. The children entering this stage of cognitive development were able to think conceptually, and organized the selling idea in a more coherent manner. This indicates that Piaget's (1970) theory of cognitive development finds empirical support in the Chinese society. However, the apparent growth in understanding of television advertising has to be weighted against the relative abilities of younger and older children to verbally express themselves, as well as their abilities to articulate the difference between programmes and commercials. Answers to three questions 'what television advertising is', 'what is its purpose' and 'why TV stations carry these

messages' revealed a range of responses to different levels of understanding of television advertising. Many younger children who found difficulty expressing what a commercial is could still identify that the commercials wanted them to try or to buy things. A higher proportion of children from grade four (aged nine to ten) could recognize the institutional function of television advertising. According to Piaget's (1970) classification system, children at these ages begin to enter the formal operations stage where they can think in more abstract terms. The findings have public policy implication that younger children need greater protection against persuasive marketing communication in the mass media. For children over eight, they have probably developed a cognitive defense and understand the selling intent of television advertising.

The findings that children liked food and beverages commercials were similar to that obtained by Ward (1972) and Yavas and Abdul-Gader (1993). This is probably because children are more familiar and experienced with the product category. Fun and enjoyment was the main reason for liking a commercial. However, there were great differences in the reasons for disliking commercials. Hong Kong children frequently mentioned 'product' and 'incorrect behaviours' as reasons. This indicated that Chinese children placed more emphasis on the moralistic orientation of commercials than Western children. They held stronger good and bad beliefs about product nature as well as social behaviours. Compared with findings of Ward (1972) and Yavas and Abdul-Gader (1993), Hong Kong children more frequently mentioned 'celebrity/personality' as a reason for both liking and disliking. This suggested that use of 'personal' or 'social' influence appealed more to Chinese children than Western children. This may also be due to the heavy use of celebrity commercials in Hong Kong.

Brand recognition for liked and disliked commercials were strong among children. Commercials enjoyed and disliked by children are more likely to be remembered. However,



the influence of the brand information on purchase intention and purchase behaviour needs further investigation. Advertisers also need to recognize the trade-offs for using a celebrity. What appeals to one group likely drives away another group.

Overall brand recall from slogans was low, reconfirming previous findings that brand names were difficult to remember. Slogans help little in brand recognition. Advertisers should consider other strategies to enhance brand recognition such as incorporating brand name in slogans and package recognition.

There has been little research on how well children understand the key messages of television advertising. Findings of this study revealed that comprehension of advertising content varied greatly by children's cognitive development and the style of presentation. Using simple dialogue, concrete examples and animated figures, children demonstrated fairly good understanding of pro-social messages. This finding should be encouraging for government officials and educators. The government should produce more campaigns to cultivate pro-social behaviours and to protect children's interest, of course in a children-friendly way. For example, younger children can learn how to respond to sexual harassment through a government publicity campaign.

Many critics and parents fear that children are particularly susceptible to commercial appeals because young viewers lack the necessary cognitive skills to defend themselves against what are often highly attractive and persuasive messages (Choate, 1975). Other undesirable consequences listed by the critics are the creation of parent-child conflict (Atkin, 1975) and disappointment when children are denied their requests (Robertson and Rossiter, 1974). The Broadcasting Authority regulates television advertising in Hong Kong. As a former colony of the United Kingdom, the code of practice on advertising standards in Hong Kong resembles that of the United Kingdom. It states that 'no product or service may be

advertised in association with a program intended for children or which large numbers of children are likely to see, which might result in harm to them physically, mentally or morally, and no method of advertising may be employed which takes advantage of the natural credulity and sense of loyalty of children' (Broadcasting Authority, 1993). Hong Kong consumers seem to be quite satisfied with the overall television advertising standard, as the number of complaints is extremely small. The 6.6 million population only made an average of 378 complaints every year on television advertising in the past five years (Broadcasting Authority, 1998). Consumers' reaction did influence advertisers' decision. A McDonalds commercial received 46 complaints shortly after its debut, after it seemed to encourage children telling lies. As a result, the client pulled out the commercial in question before the Broadcasting Authority investigated the complaints. In a quota sampling survey of 691 Hong Kong consumers, Chan and Ruidl (1996) found that 47 percent of the respondents did not agree that television advertising should be banned on children's programme (vs. 32 percent held neutral position and 21 percent agreed). In the same survey, 61 percent of the respondents agreed that the content of television advertising should be more closely regulated by the government (Chan and Ruidl, 1996). This indicates that Hong Kong consumers prefer a tighter control of advertising messages than complete banning to advertising to children.

To conclude, a majority of Hong Kong children from grade two knew what advertising was and developed appreciation of television commercials. Older children were aware of the selling intention as well as the institutional function of television advertising. Understanding of television advertising, recall of brands from slogans and comprehension of advertising content were clearly related to cognitive development of children. Advertisers targeting at children should make the commercials funny and interesting so that children will like them and remember their brands.



Table 1. Understanding what television advertising is by school year

	School Year (%)							Total
	Kind n=64	G1 64	G2 64	G3 64	G4 64	G5 64	G6 64	
Low	3	14	14	3	0	11	9	8
Medium	6	14	53	55	67	63	67	46
High	3	13	3	8	13	6	3	7
Don't know	88	59	30	34	20	20	20	39
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: Low: name specific products, part of programmes, interrupts programmes; Medium: advertise things, inform people about things to buy; High: get people to buy, sponsor programmes

Table 2. Understanding the purpose of television advertising by school year

	School Year (%)							Total
	Kind n=64	G1 64	G2 64	G3 64	G4 64	G5 64	G6 64	
Introduce product, entertainment	11	6	17	5	5	5	5	8
Make people buy things, promote products	31	44	61	78	78	66	61	60
Sponsor programmes	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Don't know	58	50	22	17	16	30	34	32
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3. Understanding why television stations carry advertising by school year

	Year (%)							Total
	Kind n=64	P1 64	P2 64	P3 64	P4 64	P5 64	P6 64	
Introduce product, entertainment	9	3	13	3	9	11	0	7
Make people buy things, promote products	13	13	25	27	20	23	16	19
Sponsor programs	0	6	9	19	36	36	47	22
Don't know/others*	78	78	53	52	34	30	38	52
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Others' include to attract audience (n=4), to test products (3), to test commercials (3), to educate (3), to give audience a break (1)

Table 4. Product categories of commercials liked by school class (total mentions=222)

	total mention	Year (%)			Total
		Kind,G1	G2-3	G4-6	
	42	81	99	222	
Food and drink	57	63	52	57	
Toys	14	15	8	12	
Mobile phones	7	3	12	8	
Restaurants and fast food shops	2	12	3	6	
Supermarkets	0	2	6	4	
Programme announcements	7	1	3	3	
Electrical appliances	5	1	3	3	
Sports goods	2	0	6	3	
Movie and entertainment	0	0	2	1	
Public Transportation	0	0	3	1	
Public services announcements	3	0	0	1	
Property	0	0	1	1	
Bank	0	0	1	0	
Car and related	2	0	0	0	
Like all	0	1	0	0	
	100	100	100	100	

Table 5. Reasons for liking commercials by school class (total mentions=212)

	total mention	Year (%)			Total
		Kind,G1	G2-3	G4-6	
	39	76	97	212	
Entertainment	62	55	56	57	
Beauty	0	0	4	2	
Product	18	34	16	23	
Celebrity/character	18	11	24	18	
Others	3	0	0	0	
Total mentions	100	100	100	100	

Table 6. Product categories of commercials disliked by school class (total mentions=115)

	Kind,G1	Year (%)		Total
		G2-3	G4-6	
total mention	17	40	58	115
Mobile phones	0	18	24	18
Food and drink	47	13	12	17
Public services announcements	6	13	9	10
Supermarkets	6	15	7	10
Toys	6	13	3	7
Property	0	8	5	5
Programme announcements	12	0	5	4
Alcohol & cigarette	0	8	3	4
Restaurants and fast food shops	6	0	3	3
Clothing	0	3	5	3
Female personal products	0	3	3	3
Medicine	0	0	7	3
Bank	0	0	7	3
Electrical appliances	12	0	0	2
Public Transportation	0	5	0	2
Movie and entertainment	0	0	2	1
Insurance	0	3	0	1
Sports goods	6	0	0	1
Hotel	0	0	2	1
Car and related	0	0	2	1
Dislike all	0	3	0	1
Total mentions	100	100	100	100

Table 7. Reasons for disliking commercials by school class (total mentions=116)

	Kind,G1	Year (%)		Total
		G2-3	G4-6	
	20	38	58	116
Entertainment	35	34	47	41
Beauty	20	11	19	16
Product	20	34	14	22
Celebrity/character	20	5	10	10
Not true	0	5	7	5
Just don't like	0	3	0	1
Incorrect behaviour	5	8	3	5
Total mentions	100	100	100	100

Table 8. Recall of brand names from slogans by school year

	Kind,G1	Year (%)		Total
		G2-3	G4-6	
<b>Slogan 1: No more worry for mother (Kinder chocolate)</b>				
Correct brand recall	15	44	35	32
Wrong recall	5	5	7	6
Don't know	80	52	58	62
<i>Chi-square=28 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				
<b>Slogan 2: A cow reared on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor (Nestle milk powder)</b>				
Correct brand recall	9	30	40	28
Wrong recall	2	6	1	3
Don't know	89	64	59	69
<i>Chi-square=44 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				
<b>Slogan 3: More than one way of enjoyment (Maltesers chocolate)</b>				
Correct brand recall	4	21	26	18
Wrong recall	13	12	8	10
Don't know	84	67	66	71
<i>Chi-square=27 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				

Table 9. Comprehension of television advertising by school year

	Kind,P1	Year (%)		Total
		P2-3	P4-6	
<b>Kinder chocolate</b>				
Full understanding	45	72	70	63
Partial/wrong understanding	37	24	29	30
Don't know	19	4	1	7
<i>Chi-square=51 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				
<b>Lipton 3 in 1 tea</b>				
Full understanding	14	41	57	40
Partial/wrong understanding	50	39	32	39
Don't know	36	20	10	20
<i>Chi-square=66 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				
<b>Taxi using gas fuel</b>				
Full understanding	13	17	44	27
Partial/wrong understanding	32	55	34	40
Don't know	55	28	22	33
<i>Chi-square=72 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				
<b>Equal right</b>				
Full understanding	27	70	84	63
Partial/wrong understanding	34	12	5	15
Don't know	40	19	11	22
<i>Chi-square=114 (sign. At 0.0001)</i>				

Note: Responses were coded as full understanding if they contained the key messages (Kinder chocolate: cat wants to get the chocolate; Lipton tea: refresh or relief from pressure; taxi using gas fuel: the fuel produces less smoke; equal right: girls can do the job that she like).



## References:

- AC Nielsen (1997) *SRG News*, Issue 84, July, 1-2.
- Atkin, C.K. (1975) *Effects of television advertising on children*. E. Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Belk, R., Mayer, R. and Driscoll, A. (1984) Children's recognition of consumption symbolism in children's products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10, 386-397.
- Blosser, B.J. and Roberts, D.F. (1985). Age differences in children's perceptions of message intent. *Communication Research*, 12(4), 455-484.
- Bradley, M.F. (1987) Nature and significance of international marketing: A review. *Journal of Business Research*, 15:June, 52-56.
- Broadcasting Authority (1993). *Television Code of Practice on Advertising Standards*, Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Broadcasting Authority (1998). Letter dated 8 September in response to the author's written enquiry.
- Brown, D. and Bryant, J. (1983) Humour in the mass media, In McGhee P.E. and Goldstein, J.H. (eds), *Handbook of Humour Research*, vol.2, *Applied Studies*, New York: Stringer-Verlag.
- Carey, G., Zhao, X., Chiamonte, J. and Eden, D. (1997) Is there one global village for our future generation? Talking to 7-12 year olds around the world. *Marketing and Research Today*. February, 12-16.
- Chan, K. and Ruidl, R. (1996) Predicting attitudes toward television advertising: The view from Hong Kong. 20th IAMCR Scientific Conference and General Assembly, August 18-22, Sydney, Australia.
- Chiu, L. H. (1987) Child-rearing attitudes of Chinese, Chinese-American, and Anglo-American mothers. *International Journal of Psychology*, 22: 409-419.
- Choate, R.B. (1975) *Petition of the Council on children, media and merchandising to issue a trade regulation rule governing the private regulation of children's television advertising*, filed before the Federation Trade Commission, Washington, DC.
- Comstock, G. and Paik, H. (1991) *Television and the American Child*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Ekblad, S. (1986) Relationships between child-rearing practices and primary school children's functional adjustment in the People's Republic of China. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 21: 697-715.
- Gaines, L. and Esserman, J.F. (1981) A quantitative study of young children's comprehension of television programmes and commercials, In J.F. Esserman (ed.), *Television Advertising and Children*, New York: Child Research Service.

- Gianinno, L. J. and Zuckerman, P.A. (1977) Measuring children's responses to television advertising. Unpublished paper with a summary version appearing in C. Leavitt (ed.), Proceedings: American Psychological Association Revision 23, 85<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, San Francisco, August.
- Greenberg, B.S., Fazal, S. and Wober, M. (1986) *Children's views on advertising*. London: Independent Broadcasting Authority, Research Report.
- Gunter, B. and McAleer J. (1997) *Children and Television*, second edition, London: Routledge.
- Hoy, M.G.; Young, C.E. and Mowen, J.C. (1986) Animated host selling advertisements: Their impact on young children's recognition, attitudes, and behavior. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 5, 171-184.
- Ho, D. (1989) Continuity and variation in Chinese patterns of socialization. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51: 149-163.
- Hsu, F.L.K. (1981) *American and Chinese: Passage to differences*, third edition, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.
- Kelly, J.L., and Tseng, H. M. (1992) Cultural differences in child rearing: A comparison of immigrant Chinese and Caucasian American mothers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 23(4): 444-455.
- Lee, C. and Green, R.T. (1991) Cross-cultural examination of the Fishbein Behavioral Intentions Model. *Journal of International Business Studies*. 22(2), 289-305.
- Levin, S.R., Petros, T.V., and Petrella, F.W. (1979) *Pre-schoolers' discrimination of television programming and commercials*. Paper presented at the Biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, San Francisco, March.
- McNeal, J.U. (1987) *Children as consumers: Insights and implications*. Massachusetts: Lexington Books.
- Meringoff, L.K. and Lesser, G.S. (1980) Children's ability to distinguish television commercials from program material. In R. P. Adler, G.S. Lesser, L.K. Meringoff, T.S. Robertson, J.R. Rossiter, and S. Ward (eds.), *The effects of television advertising on children* (pp.29-42). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Nippold, M.A., Cuyler, J.S. and Braunbeck-Price, R. (1988) Explanation of ambiguous advertisements: a developmental study with children and adolescents, *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 31, 466-474.
- Piaget, J. (1970) The stages of the intellectual development of the child. In P.H. Mussen (ed.), *Readings in child development and psychology*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Roedder, D. L. (1981) Age differences in children's responses to television advertising: An information processing approach. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 8(September), 144-153.

- Robertson, T.S. and Rossiter, J.R. (1974) Children and commercial persuasion: An attribution theory analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1(June), 12-20.
- Rubin, R.S. (1974). The effects of cognitive development on children's response to television advertising. *Journal of Business Research*, 2 (October), 409-419.
- Sheikh, A.A., Prasad, V.K. and Rao, T.R. (1974). Children's TV commercials: A review of research. *Journal of Communication*, 24(4), 126-136.
- Shrimp, T., Dyer R. and Divita, S. (1976) An experimental test of the harmful effects of premium-oriented commercials on children. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 3: 1-11.
- Suzuki, B.H. (1980) The Asian-American family. In M.D. Fantini and Cardenas (Eds.). *Parenting in a multicultural society*. New York: Longman.
- Van Evra, J.P. (1995) Advertising's impact on children as a function of viewing purpose. *Psychology and Marketing*, 12(5), 423-432.
- Wackman, D.B., Wartella, E., and Ward, S. (1977) Learning to be consumers: The role of the family. *Journal of Communication*, 27(Winter), 138-151.
- Ward, S. (1972) Children's reactions to commercials. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 12 (April), 37-45.
- Ward, S., Levingson, D., and Wackman, D.B. (1972) Children's attention to television advertising. *Television and Social Behavior*, vol. 4. Washington, D.C.: Government Printer Office, 491-516.
- Ward, S., Wackman, D.B., and Wartella, E. (1977) *How children learn to buy: The development of consumer information processing skills*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Yavas, U. and Abdul-Gader, A. (1993). Impact of TV commercials on Saudi children's purchase behaviour. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 11(2), 37-43.
- Zuckerman, P., Ziegler, M., and Stevenson, H.W. (1978) Children's viewing of television and recognition memory of commercials. *Child development*, 49, 96-104.

Professor Philip J. Kitchen  
Editor, Journal of Marketing Communications  
Chapman and Hall  
2-6 Boundary Row,  
London SE1 8HN, UK  
October 30, 1998

Dear Professor Kitchen,

Re-submission of Manuscript

Thank you for your letter on 15 September, 1998 with valuable comments on the manuscript titled '**Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising**'. The manuscript has been revised with the following changes:

Comment	Changes
Literature review	Updated references are added
Discussion of objectives	Elaborated in more details
Ethical issue on advertising to children	Added in the discussion section

Please kindly reconsider it to be published in the Journal of Marketing Communications. Please acknowledge when you received it and do not hesitate to contact me for any inquiries. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Kara Chan  
Associate Professor

Journal of Marketing Communications  
Chapman and Hall  
2-6 Boundary Row,  
London SE1 8HN, UK  
June 23, 1998

Dear editor,

Re: Submission of Manuscript

Please find attached four copies of the manuscript titled 'Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising' for your consideration of publication. Please acknowledge when you received it and do not hesitate to contact me for any inquiries. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Kara Chan  
Assistant Professor

Prof. Herbert H. Tsang  
Chairman  
Research Committee  
3 March 1999

Dear Prof. Tsang

**Re: FRG Research Project entitled “Benchmark study on communication process and effects of television advertising on children in Hong Kong” (FRG/97-98/II-24)**

Thank you for your support to carry out the above project. The research has been successfully completed and a copy of the final report is now enclosed for your consideration.

One journal paper has been accepted by the *Journal of Marketing Communications* for publication. The paper received good comments from the journal reviewers. Another journal paper and a conference paper are being prepared. The current study provides us an important benchmark for the understanding of the impact of television advertising on children.

Yours sincerely,

---

Dr. Kara Chan  
Associate Professor  
Dept. of Communication Studies

c.c. Dean, School of Communication  
Head, Department of Communication Studies

**List of Publication**

1999 Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising, accepted by *Journal of Marketing Communications*, forthcoming

**Benchmark study on communication process and effects  
of television advertising on children in Hong Kong**

Dr. Kara Chan  
Associate Professor  
Department of Communication Studies  
Hong Kong Baptist University  
Kowloon Tong  
Hong Kong  
Fax: (582) 2339-7890  
Telephone: (582) 2339-7836  
E-mail: karachan@hkbu.edu.hk

**Keyword: Television advertising – children – Hong Kong**

This study is supported by Faculty Research Grant of the Hong Kong Baptist University.

Running head: Advertising and children

March 3, 1999

\r05child\paper1.doc