

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN  
TOWARD CHILDREN'S TELEVISION ADVERTISING

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Abstract

The attitudes of parents and their children to television advertising were explored through personal interviews with 435 subjects in their homes. Attitudes of the two groups correlated, although children were consistently more favorable. Parents' reactions to a proposed ban of children's television advertising correlated positively with their level of education and extent of employment outside the home. Children's reactions to the proposed ban correlated positively with family income.

Introduction

Previous studies have found mothers to be generally negative in their attitudes toward television advertising aimed at children (Ward and Wackman, undated), and supportive of a ban on such advertising (Howard, Hulbert and Lehman, 1973). Mothers' perception of the extent to which TV advertising influences their children was found to correlate positively with their own ability to recall commercial content and the amount of television they watch (Ward and Wackman, 1971). Perceived influence declined as the age of the child increased. A negative correlation has been found between children's ages and their liking of TV commercials (McNeal, 1969; and James, 1971). A more current appraisal of parent and child attitudes toward television advertising and their reactions to a ban on such advertising is needed.

Methodology

As part of a larger study, data on parent and child attitudes toward television advertising and the prospect of its elimination were gathered from 435 mothers and children in Knoxville, Tennessee. Interviewers worked in pairs, with mother and child being interviewed simultaneously at different locations in the home, thus eliminating any opportunity for interaction between the parent and the child. Subjects were third and fourth graders from predominantly white, middle class neighborhoods.

Variables measured included children's and parents' attitudes toward television advertising, parents' attitudes toward children's commercials, and the reactions of each group to a proposal to eliminate advertising from the programs watched by children. Mothers were also asked to evaluate the overall effects of children's commercials on child viewers in general. In addition, data was collected on a number of descriptive parent characteristics, including employment status, income, and education.

Results

Parents evidenced considerable consistency among their attitudes toward television advertising in general, children's commercials specifically, effects of advertising on children, and the idea of banning commercials from children's programs.

Children's attitudes toward television advertising correlated highly with those of their parents but were consistently more favorable. Children's reactions to the elimination of commercials were also found to be negatively correlated ( $p < .001$ ) with their attitudes.

Children's attitudes were found to correlate with both grade in school ( $r = -.16$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and sex. Male subjects had more negative attitudes than females ( $p < .05$ ). Children were substantially less favorably disposed toward the proposed ban than were their parents (31 percent vs. 58 percent of the respective groups gave affirmative responses).

It was also desired to explore whether certain parent characteristics or home environment variables might be influencing parent and child views on the proposed ban. The idea of banning children's commercials was more favorably received among more highly educated mothers ( $p < .05$ ) and among those who spend more time employed outside the home ( $p < .05$ ). Children from higher income families were more in favor of the ban than those from lower income households ( $p < .05$ ).

References

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