

# PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN IN MAGAZINE ADVERTS IN NIGERIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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**Abstract-** This study employed the content analysis technique to examine the portrayal of children in print media advertisements in some Nigerian magazines. Children images from four monthly published magazines (*True Love, New African, Complete Fashion and Ebony*) were collected over a period of one year and content analyzed. A series of variables common to similar investigations were used to provide a coding scheme. Out of three hundred and forty-five (345) advertisements in the twelve selected editions of the magazines, fifty (50) advertisements portraying children were purposively chosen and content analyzed for this study. There were two levels of analysis, the individual level which concerns the character of the advertisement and the level that deals with the advertisement as a whole. The study data revealed an underrepresentation of children and accuracy in the portrayal of children in magazine advertisements in Nigeria. It was also discovered that a stereotypical view of female children is present in magazine advert images and this was not only expressed in gender stereotypical traits but also in letterform characteristics. This study therefore recommends an improvement in the portrayal of children in magazine adverts in Nigeria.

**Index Terms-** ; Advertisement; Children; Portrayal; Magazine; Content analysis; Advert images

## I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising occupies a special position within the economic organization of every modern society but it is not just an economic entity [1]. Advert images are actually a reflection of society and therefore portray prevailing cultural ideas, values and attitudes. [2], talked about the concept of 'social representations'

which are a system of values, ideas and practices with certain functions; first, to enable individuals give meaning to the material and social world; secondly to provide a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of the world; and thirdly to promote communication among the members of a community. Advertising deals with these ideas, values and practices and gives them "cultural form through its signifying practices" [3]. These signifying practices provide the words and images with a meaning that is diffused into the belief systems of a society as a code for communication.

Since advertising reaches millions of individuals daily, it has become a target for heavy scrutiny by researchers interested in the effects of these images on the formation or depiction of a social group in a stereotypical manner. Children, teenagers, youth and women constitute a very important consumer segment of most markets. Their consumption habits are unique and their purchase decisions are based on popular trends, brand image, use of new technology, flavor of food products, and style. For instance, it has been observed that young consumers have a propensity to consume more of confectionaries referred to as (junk food) and prefer them over traditional forms of food. This characteristic is exploited by marketers and advertisers by associating convenience and a brand image to beverages like Coke, Fanta, Pepsi, Juice, ice creams etc and confectionaries like cakes, meat/fish pies, burgers, pizzas, and other types of fast-food. The fast food and beverage business sector attaches family or children's image and perception of fun, enjoyment and prestige with their products. However, recent articles in several marketing and retail industry trade publications have suggested an increase in the use of children in print advertising and a trend toward portraying children who appear in print advertisements in a more adult fashion. For example, in two articles in AdWeek's Marketing Week, the authors described advertising campaigns that "show smart youngsters who look, talk, and act like scaled-down versions of their baby boom parents" [4] and the "star divinely dressed kids looking hair-raisingly adorable" [5]. Another author of a third article in a trade publication called Stores, wrote, "Kids look different in department store and specialty store advertising, too. The trend is away from the cute, impish kid and toward a more serious, older-looking, somewhat sophisticated and even elegant child". [5], concluded that these

"hot shot kids with dynamite duds and aristocratic attitudes invite unfortunate comparison, not [just] with ourselves, but with our children". These referred articles described children who appeared in adverts for children's clothing.

However, [4], pointed out that "Kids are not only taking on new roles and images in ads for products targeted to them, they are also playing a bigger role in ads for adult products". One reason given for the increased use of children in advertisements aimed at adults is that children are increasingly influencing the buying decisions of their parents [4]. It appears from a search of the literature, however, that there have been no attempts to systematically explore how children are actually portrayed in advertising. Searches of the Social Science Subject Index from 1976 through 1990, the Business Periodicals Index from 1980 through May 1991, and of the Index for Advances in Consumer Research for the years 1980 through 1988 revealed no studies on this topic. A computer search of the PsychInfo data base for the years 1967 through February 1991 was also conducted and revealed only one study (North, 1985) similar to the present study. In that study, a content analysis of South African consumer magazines was conducted to determine the use advertisers made of children and the different roles in which they were portrayed in advertising illustrations.

A number of studies have used content analysis to determine how other populations have been portrayed in print advertisements. African Americans ([6]; [7]; [8]), women ([9]; [10]; [11]; [12]), men [13] and the elderly ([14]; [15]) have all been the subjects of such studies. In general, the purpose of each of these studies was to identify stereotypes of the population under study and/or to determine the frequency or accuracy with which the particular population was portrayed. Thus, this study seeks to examine children representation in print advertisements in Nigerian magazines. The Social Learning theory and Cultivation theory are the theories underpinning this study. Children representation in print advertisements plays a crucial role in informing and educating the audience about a particular idea, product and/or service. Different age groups of human beings are represented in print advertisements including children. The question in this study therefore is: to what extent are children represented in Nigerian magazine adverts and how are the children represented?

The main objective of this study is to ascertain whether there is the portrayal of children in print adverts in Nigerian magazines, determine how frequently they are portrayed and how accurately they are portrayed. This paper will therefore attempt to present answers to the following questions.

1. To what extent do print adverts in the selected magazine use children in their adverts?
2. How have the print advertisements in selected magazines portrayed children?
3. How do magazines reproduce gender stereotype in the portrayal of children in print advertisements?

Advertisers like to- use children-and not only in advertisements for toys and diapers. Babies are attention grabbers; they are especially good at catching the eyes of women consumers who so often constitute the target market. Perhaps most important for

the cautious advertiser, children rarely offend. Picturing children allows advertisers to call up rich, cherished associations: nostalgia, love, the fullness of the future, the comfort of home, pleasures of family life. The use of children is a way to suggest many of the values that advertisers routinely associate with their products: newness, innocence, energy, rejuvenation, mildness, happiness, protection. Increasingly, corporate image advertising draws on images of children to suggest kindness, responsibility, benevolence, and the ordinariness of their concerns.

Children play a unique role in advertising because the promise of betterment for the next generation has proven to be one of the most effective inducements to consume. While the media have recently focused (with considerable ambivalence) on yuppie parents and their expectations for their children, lower middle class, working class, and poor parents also have aspiration for their children. Parents' potent dreams for a better life find expression in the purchase of books, toys, clothes - even diapers. Or, as a Fischer Price Marketing executive knowingly put it: All mothers want the best they can afford for their baby. Motherhood is one thing that transcends all cultures and economic barriers.

A study analyzing the portrayal of African Americans in magazine advertisements from 1950-1982 was done by [7], they found that although there was a long term rise in the proportion of advertisements that contained African Americans, African Americans were still under represented in magazine advertisements. With respect to the portrayal of children, [7] found that fifteen percent of African American advertisements (defined as any advertisement that contained an African American, whether or not a white person was also present in the advertisement) were represented solely by children whereas only 5 percent of white advertisements used only children. When children were shown with adults, 38% of African American children were shown under the exclusive supervision of white adults and 31% of African American children were shown under adult African American supervision. No white children were shown under the exclusive supervision of African American adults-66% were overseen by adult whites and the remaining one-third were unsupervised.

Content analysis was adopted here. Content analysis has been defined as "...any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specific characteristics of messages" [16]. In recent years, the marketing literature has witnessed a resurgence of this technique for studying the printed record. The goal is to summarize a vast amount of verbal information in a form that is objective, systematic and quantitative [17]. The advertisements of monthly magazines (*True Love*, *New African*, *Complete Fashion* and *Ebony*) distributed over a period of six years (2007-2013) were examined. The four magazines were purposively selected since they constitute the top four in sales according to the latest research of RAI Consultants Public Ltd in Abuja, thus attaining a wide readership. Three editions of each of the magazines were chosen for this study due to the availability of the hard copies of these magazines. Out of three hundred and forty-five advertisements in the twelve selected editions of the magazines,

fifty (50) advertisements were purposively chosen for this study. These advertisements were chosen based on the inclusion of children as characters in the advertisement not necessarily as “lead” characters.

II. DATAT ANALYSIS

Here comes the most crucial step for your research pu **Table**

**One**

**Frequency Distribution of all the advertisements in the selected Magazine**

S/ N	Title of Magazine	Editions	Adverts with Children	Adverts without Children	Total No. of Adverts for each edition
1	True Love	Aug./Sept. 2008	2	10	12
2		January 2009	5	27	32
3		July 2009	7	22	29
	<b>Total</b>		<b>14 (19%)</b>	<b>59(81%)</b>	<b>73(100%)</b>
4	Ebony	April 2007	8	55	63
5		August 2008	7	40	47
6		September 2008	7	43	50
	<b>Total</b>		<b>2 (14%)</b>	<b>138 (86%)</b>	<b>160(100%)</b>
7	Complete Fashion	2012 vol. 4 No.19	2	8	10
8		2012 vol. 4 No.24	3	25	28
9		2013 vol. 5 No.30	2	15	17
	<b>Total</b>		<b>7 (13%)</b>	<b>48(87%)</b>	<b>55(100%)</b>
10	New African	March 2007	2	12	14
11		December 2007	3	18	21
12		September 2008	2	20	22
	<b>Total</b>		<b>7 (12%)</b>	<b>50 (88%)</b>	<b>57 (100%)</b>
<b>Grand Total of all the Adverts</b>			<b>14% N = 50</b>	<b>86% N = 295</b>	<b>100% N = 345</b>

The data in table one shows that only 19 percent of all the adverts in True Love Magazine during the study period represent children, while 81 percent represents adults. d printed) in their periodicals and get indexed by number of sources.

14 percent of the entire adverts in Ebony Magazine use child(ren) as the character or one of the characters in their adverts, while 86 percent of the adverts do not represent children.

Also, 13 percent of the adverts in Complete Fashion Magazine portray children, while the remaining 87 percent of the adverts portray adults.

In addition, 12 percent of the entire adverts in New African Magazine represent children, while 88 percent of the adverts portray adults.

In sum, only 14 percent (50 adverts) of the entire adverts (345 adverts) recorded from the selected magazines over the study period represents children, while the other 86 percent represents adults.

The results suggest that children are under-represented in all the print adverts of the selected magazines, while adults on the other hand were over-represented in the adverts.

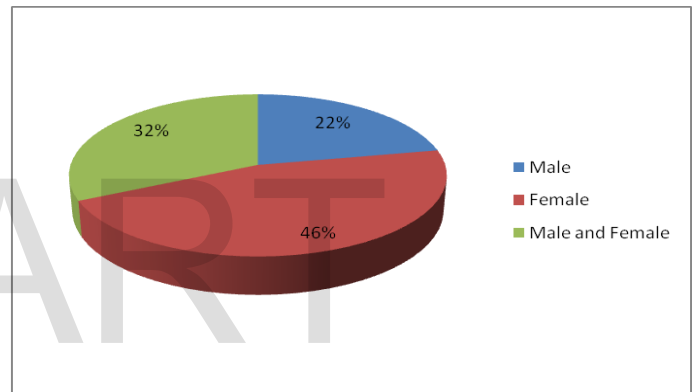


Figure 1: Sex of Children

The data in figure one shows that 46 percent of the children whose image were used for adverts are female, 22 percent of the children are male, while 32 percent were a combination of male and female children. This suggests that more female children are used in print adverts than male children.

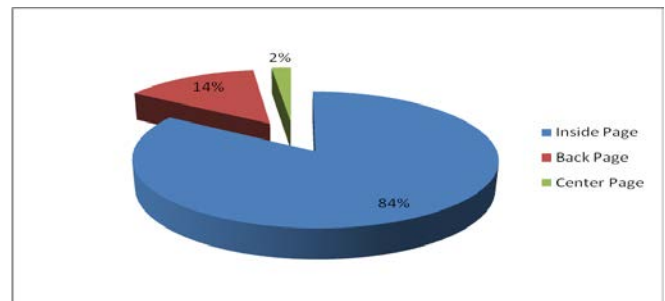


Figure Two: Placement of Adverts

The data in figure two shows that no advertisement portraying children was placed in the front page of the selected magazines, 84 percent of the adverts appeared in the inside pages, 14 percent of the adverts appeared at the back pages, while only 2 percent of the adverts were placed at the center pages of the selected magazines. This suggests that, magazines through their page planning do not give prominence to adverts portraying children as most of the adverts were placed in the inside pages of the magazines.

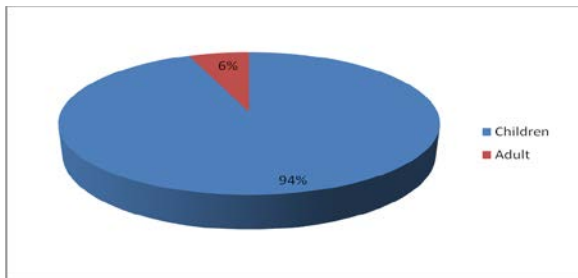


Figure Three: Accuracy of Children Portrayal

The data in figure three reveals that 94 percent of children used in the adverts were accurately portrayed as children, while only 6 percent of the adverts portrayed children as adults. This suggests that majority (94%) of adverts accurately portrayed children.

Table Four: Partners of Children in the Adverts

Partners	Frequency	Percent
Children	17	34%
Adult	23	46%
None	10	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table four shows that 46 percent of the partners in adverts portraying children were adults, 34 percent were children, while only 20 percent of the children do not have partners in the adverts. This suggests that a good number of the pictures used in the adverts were pictures portraying a family life. However, the existence of a partner differentiated the two categories of advertisement. When children were targeted in the adverts, (69%) of the time, the partner of the main character was another child rather than an adult (6%), whereas when adults are the target, the partner was more often an adult (34.6%). When its children alone (38%) and a child with one or more children as partners (10%).

Table Five: Target Audience of Adverts

Audience	Frequency	Percent
Children	24	48%
Adult	10	20%
Children and Adult	16	32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table five shows that 48 percent of the adverts analyzed were targeting children, 20 percent had adults as target, while the remaining 32 percent targeted both children and adults.

A cross-tabulation of the target audience by the type of product indicated that there are significant differences. When the target is adults the children characters are presented in advertisements of *Home products* (more often *Food* in 19% of the ads and *Home Equipment* in 16% of the ads). When the target of the advertisements is children, the advertisements are more often for *Personal effects products* (mostly *Clothes* since this is the case for 58% of the ads under study).

Again, differences in typographic dimensions based on the target of the advertisement were examined. This was to determine the effect of the target group on the display typography of each advertisement. The investigation revealed that the target group has an effect of the choice of typeface and color of the message of each advertisement. Particularly, there was a noticeable use of *Script* typeface in adverts targeting children (25%) when compared with its use when the target was adults (7%) even though the typefaces *Sans-Serif* was one of the most frequently used independent of target group. *White* is the most commonly used color in adverts for all the target groups (27% for children and 33% for adults) but there are differences in the use of *Black* colored or *Multi-colored* text. When adverts target adults, the *Black* color is used more when compared to its use in adverts targeting children. In addition, advertisements with children as target group use *Multi-colored* text in comparison with advertisement of products targeting adults.

Table Six: Gender Stereotyping in Print Adverts

	Frequency	Percent
Advert with gender stereotype	38	76%
Advert without gender stereotype	12	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data in table six shows that more than two-third of the characters in the advertisements (76%) were found to reproduce a stereotype (18% masculine and 58% feminine), while only 24 percent of the entire adverts did not reproduce any stereotypes. These stereotypes appeared in the choice of words, typefaces, font colors, choice of characters, etc. The superiority of the feminine stereotypes was more clearly evident when the target group was adults. Consequently, 35% of the advertisements depicted a character reproducing a feminine stereotype while only 16% of the advertisements targeting children depicted feminine stereotypes. The most common feminine stereotype was concerned with a representation of girls as content

(53%) or passive (20%). This is in line with the finding that girls are more often depicted doing a *Passive activity* in comparison to boys. The advertisements with a masculine or a feminine stereotype were compared on the basis of their typographic elements. Interestingly, a female stereotype was accompanied by greater use of *Low case* and *Bold letters for male stereotype*. There was also a trend for greater use of *Rounded* letters in comparison to advertisement with male stereotypes.

This study had two levels of analysis, the individual level which concerned each character of an advertisement and another level which dealt with the advertisement as a whole. In the individual level, it was investigated whether the characteristics of children as characters in advertisements targeting either adults or children differed. It also examined whether the images of children reproduced gender stereotypes. In the second level, the typography display in each ad was analyzed and relationships were found to exist with the target groups and the feminine stereotypes. The results indicated that children are more often present in advertisements of *Personal* products targeting children and in advertisements of *Home* products targeting adults. In addition, when the advert target was children, majority of the ads were for clothing companies and retail stores.

Therefore, it is expected that advertisers should use more of children in ads for personal products for young people since their presence make the products more likable to children. On the other hand, when the target audience is adults, children are presented in ads for *Home* products because these products are inevitably connected to the idea of family and caring of the family. Thus, the presence of children in such adverts probably is to sensitize the adult targets, while the presence of more than one child in an advertisement targeting children supposedly makes the product advertised more desirable to children. Additionally, the presence of just one child in an advert could be an effort to convince the target (other children) about the sincerity of the advert and the reliability of the product advertised.

Looking at typographic dimensions, adverts for children products were expressed with more frequent use of *Script* typeface and *Multicolored* text. On the contrary, adverts for adult products reveal that the text was more often *Black* in color when compared with ads of children products. [18], argued that typefaces have the effect of forming inferences about the brand which arise from the characteristics of the typeface itself. The visual properties of typefaces such as *Script* are conceptualized as communicating unique semantic associations to individuals which might be distinct from the content of the written text. [19] claimed that semantic associations may be activated through three paths: 1) through consistent use in a particular situation, 2) through direct relation and 3) via associations with abstract connotative dimensions. For

example, the script typeface (like the one used to convey the Bournvita logo and like the ones used in the ads of this study) may activate “gentleness” associations through consistent use on products associated with gentleness. Through the direct route, the typeface may convey the concept of “thin”, given the delicate style of writing. Finally, through the connotative route, the script typeface may convey “elegance” to consumers. The more frequent use of the *Script* typeface in ads targeting children in comparison to ads of products targeting adults might serve the purpose of promoting the product as appropriate for younger ages (like the gentleness of Bournvita products are suitable for infants and young children). On the other hand, since the majority of these ads were about clothes, it could be argued that there is an effort of presenting such product as both elegant and appropriate for children. The use of a *Multicolored* text is expected in the ads of products for children because colors are part of children’s everyday lives (for example in their drawings, story books, and colorful toys). Therefore, these colors transform the product in the printed image into a product of everyday life related to play or other joyful activities. On the contrary, in the ads of products for adults, there is more use of the *Black/White* color which is the color used in newspapers and books which are sources of not simple information but of reliable knowledge. So the rationale behind the use of black color in these ads is the increase of reliability of the meaning of the text.

Study findings confirm that gender stereotypical portrayals are a declining trend in Nigerian magazine advertisements however it still has a noticeable percentage. The results are in line with previous studies demonstrating a representation of girls as more passive. It is also interesting that female stereotypes are more often present than male stereotypes and this is exemplified by the frequent use of *Low case* and *Bold* letters in advert headlines portraying masculine stereotypes. According to [20], bold letters are used to increase salience but at the same time can be used to signify ideational and interpersonal meanings. He argues that bold can be made to mean “daring” or “assertive” but it could be the opposite case. The use of bold when a feminine stereotype is present can be to mean “timid” or “insubstantial” which relate to the weak and shy nature of females.

### III. CONCLUSION

Concerns over the influence of the various media, and particularly advertising on children remain high. However, most adults seldom consider how the media, including advertising, influence them or their interactions with others. Does the way children are portrayed in the media affect the way we respond to them? However, this study does describe how advertisements in these selected magazines portrayed children and provides the bases for further research. Sequel to the findings in this study, the following recommends were made:

1. There is need for studies that explore how other media portray children are necessary to determine whether differences exist in the portrayal of children among the various media.
2. Analysis of print advertisements in the same magazines used in this study prior to 1953 and since 1988 would provide a better picture of how advertisements portrayed children and how that portrayal has changed.
3. Analysis of advertisements from additional classifications of consumer magazines would provide a broader picture of how children are portrayed.

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