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**CHILDREN AND TELEVISION ADVERTISING:
EFFECTIVENESS OF SPOKES-CHARACTERS**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Rashmi Shyam

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ABSTRACT

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION ADVERTISING: EFFECTIVENESS OF SPOKES-CHARACTERS

by Rashmi Shyam

This study explored the effectiveness of animated spokes-characters in television advertisements towards children with respect to brand recall, content recall, persuasive intent, purchase intent, credibility, and appeal. The socialization theory, source credibility model, and the social learning theory have helped establish an appropriate structure for analyzing and interpreting the response of children to advertisements featuring animated spokes-characters.

The results indicated that there was a clear distinction of affinity towards advertisements with animated spokes-characters by children, compared to advertisements with human spokes persons. Further, the children related to advertisements primarily as a conduit of product information and evaluated specific advertisements based upon their liking of the spokes-character. The results also show that television advertising influences the attitudes and behavior of children, and the commercial format used by advertisers is an important factor in the product selection behavior.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
Advertising and Animation - A Conceptual Background	4
Spokes-Characters and Spokes Persons	6
Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Models	8
Locus of Control	12
Associative Learning and Celebrity Endorsers	12
Advertising Recognition and Brand Recall	13
Consumer Socialization of Children	15
Stages of Cognitive and Social Development	16
Advertising and Persuasion	19
Understanding Advertising Intent	20
Advertising Tactics and Appeals	21
The Social Learning Theory	22
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	26
Development of Stimulus Materials	26
Sample Group	26
Measures and Methodology	27
FINDINGS	29
Recall of Brand Names	29
Recall of Advertising Content	30
Understanding the Persuasive Intent of the Advertisements	31
Purchase Intent	32
Credibility and Appeal	32

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS	34
Limitations of the Study	36
Recommendations for Future Study	37
REFERENCES	39
APPENDIX A - Scripts of Advertisements	46
APPENDIX B - Questionnaire	48
APPENDIX C - IRB Approval Letter	54

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 – Results on brand recall of products	30
TABLE 2 – Results on content recall	30
TABLE 3 – Results on persuasive intent	32
TABLE 4 – Percentage of responses on the purchase intent	32
TABLE 5 – T test analysis for credibility and appeal	33
TABLE 6 – Percentage of responses on credibility and appeal	33

Introduction

Advertising has a profound impact on our society. USA Today writer, Tom Fox, aptly described the effect of advertising on different aspects of social and cultural health. Attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideologies are often communicated through advertisements and they also determine how, when, and if certain groups are represented in the advertising messages (Fox, 2001).

Television is available virtually all over the world and children are exposed to advertising, to a large extent, through this medium. In the United States, children between the ages of 6 and 14 years watch about 25 hours of television every week, and are exposed to approximately 20,000 advertisements every year (Moore & Lutz, 2000). In the United Kingdom, children in the same age group are exposed to about 18,000 advertisements every year (Carvel, 2000).

Advertisers see children as a rich and influential market because of their spending power, and the influence they have on the purchasing habit of other family members (Buckingham, 2000). According to Furnham (2000), American children between the ages of 4 and 12 years spend over \$24 billion on direct purchases, and influence over \$190 billion in family household purchases every year.

Recent research has led to an emerging field of study pertaining to children as consumers. Consequently, a wide range of topics reflecting children's growing sophistication as consumers involving their knowledge of products, brands, advertising,

shopping, pricing, decision-making strategies, parental influence and negotiation approaches have emerged. Researchers have also examined the social aspects of children as consumers by exploring the development of consumption symbolism, social motives for consumption, and materialism.

Developments in consumer socialization take place in a social context including the family, peers, mass media, and marketing institutions. Parents create direct opportunities by interacting with their children on purchase requests, giving allowances, and taking them on shopping excursions (Ward, Wackman, & Wartella, 1977). Peers are a significant source of influence affecting consumer beliefs. Mass media and advertising provide supplementary information about consumption and the value of material goods (Atkin, 1977; Gorn & Florsheim, 1985; Robertson, Rossiter, & Gleason, 1979). Major developments in advertising concepts in the recent past have also contributed to the growth of children as consumers. As a part of this process, the dynamic role of animation in advertising justifies new research with respect to both animation techniques and the use of animated spokes-characters.

A spokes-character is a fictional persona employed to sell a product or a service. These characters have played a prominent role in advertising in the last 100 years. However, in recent times, the animated spokes-characters on television are seen to be more promotion oriented, compared to their earlier counterparts. Advances in animation techniques are widespread, which has led to an increase in the reach of advertised

products. Spokes-characters form an important link in the consumer socialization process of children, and contribute to the effectiveness of advertisements. They attract attention, enhance identification of a product, and achieve promotional continuity. Research suggests that advertisements employing spokes-characters have a greater ability to change consumer brand preferences than those that do not (Ogilvy & Raphaelson, 1987).

The perception of children towards advertising is an issue that concerns policy makers, marketers and parents. The debate on the persuasiveness nature of advertising and children's understanding of television advertising is vital, and has been an important issue. Despite extensive research in the field of advertising, little has been looked into the effectiveness of spokes-characters on children. This research study aims to examine the presence of animated spokes-characters in television advertisements and the response of children. In this process, *socialization theory*, *social learning theory* and the *source credibility model* help understand the various internal and external influences on the perception of children towards television advertising.

The study focuses on two broad areas: (a) response of children towards animated spokes-characters in advertisements with respect to brand recall, content recall, credibility, and appeal; and (b) the persuasive nature of advertising with respect to purchase intent.

Literature Review

Television is the primary source of entertainment and information for millions of families. For a completely new generation of children, television is as influential as a parent or a teacher. Children begin viewing television at a very young age, and inevitably encounter advertising messages much sooner than they develop the cognitive abilities to recognize commercial persuasion. The issue of television advertising directed towards children is one of the most complex and emotional subjects in American society. Atkin (1995) notes, "The key question to address is no longer whether advertising influences children, but what degree of impact occurs."

Advertising and Animation – A Conceptual Background

Since the 1900s, animation has given birth to various characters. These characters have generated a distinctive credibility to create the illusion of life. Animation historians and advertising experts have associated viewer propensity to "suspend disbelief" with the ability of animation to produce believable characters (Baldwin, 1982). The push for a return to high quality animation has resulted from a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the poor quality animation churned out for children's television in the 1970s and early 1980s. Consumers have responded warmly to the recent animated offerings for children of all ages. The film, "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", a harbinger of advanced live action and animation combination techniques became the highest money grosser of 1988. "The

Little Mermaid”, Disney’s first full length animated film in decades, followed the same path successfully.

The last decade has seen a rebirth in the classic animated film industry, fueled by technological breakthroughs. Increase in advertiser interest in animation was fueled by the success of the California Raisins advertisement, which popularized the *claymation* technique. This technique has the unique ability to imitate live action. The renewal of animation in film and television has generated a great deal of interest in celebrity character licensing. Celebrity spokes-characters, like their human counterparts, have a non-advertising origin, and are licensed to endorse a number of products (Calcott & Alvey, 1991). Although celebrity characters from Mickey Mouse to the Flintstones have endorsed a variety of products throughout advertising history, they have been especially visible in recent years. Newer celebrity characters like Roger Rabbit, Garfield, and Bart Simpson have become hot commodities in the burgeoning licensing business. Licensing companies have been taking advantage of this trend to reintroduce older characters. The result has been a host of celebrity spokes-characters appearing for an ever-widening variety of products, including luxury goods, parity products and public service advertising. Examples include Peanuts for Metropolitan Life Insurance, and Scooby Doo for UNICEF.

Spokes-characters and Spokes Persons

According to the *hierarchy of effects* model of the consumer adoption process, popular spokes persons have their strongest impact on the awareness and purchase stages through their ability to attract attention and the tendency of the audience to imitate them. An experiment by Atkin and Block (1983) supports this view that animated spokes-characters are influential in shaping children's views of advertised products. Their study portrayed virtually identical versions of advertisements, one with and one without an animated spokes-character endorsing the same product. The results showed that the popular characters in the advertisements significantly enhanced children's liking of the product.

Spokes persons in advertisements are selected because of their ability to echo established roles or traits, which can capitalize on existing public perceptions. Advertisers believe that messages delivered by popular personalities achieve a high degree of attention and recall by consumers (Ohanian, 1990). Academic researchers have amounted empirical evidence to demonstrate the benefits of using spokes persons for product endorsements. In a separate study, Atkin and Block (1983) found that the use of a celebrity spokes person in beer advertising led to more favorable advertisement ratings and positive product evaluations. They found that spokes persons are effective because they transfer desired meanings to the products they advertise. They can create a desirable

image for the product by linking the personality to the product in the minds of the consumers.

Freidman (1984) says that endorsers include both individuals who are known to the public for their achievements in areas other than the product class endorsed, and spokes-characters, who are directly associated with the product category being advertised. Decisions regarding the type of endorser to use are important, as this can affect the level of awareness and recall.

Marketers are discovering that animation is a highly successful way to reach children. In 1992, \$500 million was spent on campaigns that featured animated characters such as Garfield and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. An increasing number of companies are choosing to use animated characters rather than real celebrities to lend personality to their products. One reason for this growing trend is the realization that companies are less likely to be embarrassed by spokes-characters such as Pink Panther, Snoopy and Chester Cheetah than by well known personalities such as Michael Jackson and O.J. Simpson. Another reason is the immense power of drawn images as a medium of communication. Advertisers know that cartoons can help consumers understand complex concepts with a single glance, and that they can infuse warmth and feeling even into the dullest product lines.

When animated spokes-characters are used, a wide variety of methods is used to cue animal gender. Most often, the appearance and names of animal characters are used.

For instance, Tony the Tiger, Minnie Mouse and Simba are clearly identifiable with gender. In the absence of other cues, clothes, long hair (Hodge & Tripp, 1986) and voice are used. In a study (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, & Derbyshire, 1994), toddlers spend more time looking at pictures, when accompanied by voices matching the gender of the character in the picture.

Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Models

The likeability of a spokes-character by an audience largely depends on its credibility and attractiveness. The source credibility model and the source attractiveness model, which have theoretical foundations in social psychology, assert that the source of information must be familiar and likeable to the consumer, for it to be effective (McGuire, 1985). Expertise of the source with respect to the product being advertised, as perceived by the consumer and the level of truthfulness emphasize some of the concepts of source credibility (Aaker & Norris, 1982). The theory of source credibility has received considerable attention in the academic literature (Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978). The dimensions of source expertise and trustworthiness are important to conceptualizing credibility and shown to be influential in persuading consumers (Moore, Hausknecht & Thamodaran, 1986; Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978; Wu & Shaffer, 1987) and in influencing attitudes (Craig & McCann, 1978; McGinnies & Ward, 1980).

According to Ohanian (1990), source credibility is an important concept for an effective advertisement and the positive characteristics of a communicator affect the

receiver's acceptance of a message. Ohanian defined a valid and reliable scale for source credibility. According to him, credibility consists of the following components:

1. *Expertise*: The knowledge that the communicator possesses to support the claims made in the advertisement.

2. *Trustworthiness*: The confidence level of the consumer in the source, for providing information in an objective and honest manner.

3. *Attractiveness*: The perceptions of the receiver regarding the prestige of the source, in terms of familiarity and attractiveness.

A considerable body of evidence documents the importance of physical attractiveness in determining the effectiveness of communication and attitude change (Chaiken, 1979). According to Chaiken, physical attractiveness elicits positive emotional responses during initial contacts.

Liking can be defined as a global positive response towards an object or idea, which has underlying cognitive and affective components (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). There are two reasons why advertising likeability translates into advertising effectiveness: when consumers like an advertisement, they are more likely to pay attention to it and they may transfer those positive feelings to the brand. In fact, recent applied studies have suggested that liking of an advertisement may be one of the best indicators of advertising effectiveness (Brown & Stayman, 1992). Current research also

indicates that advertisement likeability may be associated with different attributes for different types of advertisements (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). Thus, the attributes that make spokes-character advertising likeable may be different from the attributes those make non spokes-character advertising likeable.

Research by Callcott & Alvey (1991) suggests that animated spokes-characters are popular with audiences and effective in advertising because they may serve as objects of nostalgia. The authors found that spokes-characters created specifically for a product or brand produced higher percentages of correct product recall, than did human spokes persons.

Commercials with animated spokes-characters score above average in ability to change brand preference (Stewart & Furse, 1986). Callcott and Phillips (1996) found that commercials featuring animated characters were watched more often than other types of commercials, and that brand liking was affected by spokes-character likeability. Several respondents in their study admitted to buying products, because of spokes-characters. Advertisers realizing the impact on children by animated spokes-characters have begun using them in their campaigns. For example, the spokes-characters in Sesame Street deliver auto safety messages.

There are several reasons why an animated spokes-character may be influential: they attract attention to the advertisement in the cluttered stream of messages; they are entertaining; and seen as more trustworthy because of their selfless interest in the product

(Atkin & Block, 1983). Atkin and Block examined the effects of animated spokes-characters on a younger sample. Most of the differences on advertisement ratings and product images occurred among the youth sample and the degree of influence on adults was low. This study also coincided with the research done by Gilbert (1957), who found that advertisements had a deep effect on children. Gilbert opines that children are wonderfully sensitive, tending to identify with the emotional upheavals of a character. According to her, they become so involved in a character hero, be it fictional or real, that they proudly quote his wisdom to their parents and friends. Based on this knowledge, advertisers build thousands of products, games and garments.

Media researcher, Cedric Cullingford, found in a qualitative study of attitudes of children towards British advertisements, that in many popular advertisements, the product advertised was not as important as the style of presentation. Most children when asked why they like an advertisement said nothing about the product. The four main reasons children gave for liking certain advertisements were the personalities, the gimmicks, the humor, and the songs. In a survey, the British Psychological Society found that by introducing vegetable loving cartoon characters, the fruit and vegetable intake among children more than doubled. This was similar to the effect the animated spokes-character Popeye had on spinach consumption. Popeye the sailor, who develops superhuman strength by eating spinach, had a huge impact on the eating habits of children.

Locus of Control

Viewers respond to animated characters in two ways: *internalization*, where the viewer adopts what the celebrity says, because he or she is honest and sincere, and *identification*, where an individual aspires to be like the celebrity (Kamins, 1989). According to the locus of control construct, viewers use advertising as an information resource. Children must acquire two key information processing skills to achieve comprehension of advertising messages: they must be able to identify content, and interpret the commercial messages. Each of these capabilities develops over time, largely as a function of cognitive growth and development rather than the accumulation of any particular amount of experience with media content.

Associative Learning and Celebrity Endorsers

Associative learning principles are based on a conception of memory as a network, consisting of various nodes connected by associative links (Hinton, McClelland & Rumelhart 1986). In this study, both animated spokes-characters and brands represent nodes, which initially are unconnected, but become linked over time through the endorsement process. Feelings towards a spokes-character are expected to transfer to the endorsed brand through a recurring association.

Advertising Recognition and Brand Recall

Recognition and recall are key measures of advertising effectiveness.

Recognition measures the presence of a trace of a commercial in memory and recall accesses this, via the brand link. In some respects, recognition is a more robust and insensitive measure than recall, and can be used to justify more modest advertising expenditure.

The average recall of television commercials has decreased over the past decade (du Plessis, 1994). Gunter, Furnham, & Beeson (1997) examined the relationship between recall and the degree of involvement of viewers, in the television programs they were watching. They found that, as audience involvement and liking of a program increased, recall of advertisements generally deteriorated. However, other studies have found that low involvement programs elicit lower advertising recall (Hoffman & Batra, 1991). Viewer moods and emotional arousals induced by programs have also been examined in relation to advertising effectiveness (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987; Kamins, Marks, & Skinner, 1991).

Several trends in children's brand awareness are evident, as children mature. Children's awareness and recall of brand names increase with age, from early to middle childhood (Ward, 1977), and from middle childhood through adolescence. Brand awareness develops first for child oriented product categories, such as cereal, snacks and toys. The knowledge for more adult oriented product categories develops later, as these

products become more salient or more relevant to older children. In a survey by Ward (1977), children from kindergarten to sixth grade named as many brands as possible in four different product categories, namely soft drinks, gum, gasoline and cameras. On an average, the number of brand names for soft drinks increased from 1.2 to 2.4 to 3.3 brands for kindergartners, third graders and sixth graders, respectively. Only the older children in the third and sixth grades were able to name at least one brand of gasoline and cameras, with sixth graders naming more brands than third graders.

To children, products and brands are probably the most salient aspects of the market place. Even before they are able to read, 2-year-old children can recognize familiar characters on products such as toys and clothing. By kindergarten, children begin to recall brand names from seeing them advertised on television or featured on product packages. This is especially prominent, if the brand names are associated with salient visual cues such as colors, pictures or animated characters.

Prior research has focused the effect of brand names on advertising recall. Keller, Heckler and Houston (1998) found that brand names that semantically suggest a product benefit leads to a greater recall of advertised claims, while non-suggestive brand names are less effective. Brands with more memorable commercials tend to generate above average levels of awareness and subsequently sales volumes (Willke, 1993). However, those brands in heavily advertised categories, such as cereals, laundry detergents, coffee and soft drinks, achieve somewhat lower levels of related recall than brands in less

advertised categories. This implies that promotional activity or clutter may have a slightly negative impact on advertising recall (Willke, 1993).

Another factor that influences advertising recall is the duration of the television commercial. Longer commercials provide viewers with more opportunity to process the message and enhances viewer learning. The degree of learning increases the likelihood of retrieval and thus of brand name recall (du Plessis, 1994; Pieters & Bijmolt, 1997). However, brand name recall for informational commercials is affected more by frequency of brand mentions than by commercial length. Thus, longer commercials facilitate learning and recall by allowing the same information to be repeated more frequently within a single exposure (Singh & Cole, 1993).

Consumer Socialization of Children

Consumer Socialization is the study of children and their socialization into the consumer role. Scott Ward defines consumer socialization as a process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace (Ward, 1974). The period from birth to adolescence contains dramatic developments in cognitive functioning and social maturation. Children develop abilities to go beyond perceptual appearances and to think more abstractly about their environment. They acquire information processing skills to readily organize and use what they learn about their environment, and develop a deeper understanding of

interpersonal situations. This allows them to see the world through different perspectives.

Stages of Cognitive and Social Development

The most well known framework for characterizing shifts in basic cognitive abilities is Piaget's theory of cognitive development. This theory proposes four main stages of cognitive development: (a) *sensorimotor*, which traces the development of new born babies to two years; (b) *preoperational*, which traces development from two years to seven years; (c) *concrete operational*, which traces development from seven years to nine years, and (d) *formal operational*, which traces development from nine years to adults. Vast differences exist in the cognitive abilities and resources available to children at these stages. However, the preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages are of most interest to consumer researchers.

In the consumer behavior literature, children belong to one of three segments; *strategic processors*, *cued processors*, and *limited processors*, based on the information processing skills they possess (Roedder, 1981). Strategic processors, who are children aged 12 and older, use a variety of strategies for storing and retrieving information, such as verbal labeling, rehearsal, and retrieval cues to guide memory search. Cued processors, who are children in the age group of 7 to 11 years, use a similar set of strategies to enhance information storage and retrieval, but typically need to be aided by explicit prompts or cues. Finally, most children under seven years of age are limited

processors, with processing skills that are not yet fully developed or successfully utilized in learning situations. These children are characterized as having mediating deficiencies, referring to the fact that they often have difficulty using storage and retrieval strategies, even when prompted to do so.

Development in a social perspective is addressed by Selman (1980), who provides a particularly apt description of how children's abilities to understand different perspectives progress through a series of stages. In the preschool and kindergarten years, children are unaware of any perspective other than their own. The next stage is the social informational role between the ages of six and eight years, where children become aware that others may have different opinions or motives, but believe that this is due to having different information rather than a different perspective on the situation. The final stage is the social and conventional system role in the age group of 15 years and older. This is the ability to understand another person's perspective as it relates to the social group.

Consumer socialization occurs in the context of dramatic, cognitive, and social development. It is also a developmental process that proceeds through a series of stages as children mature into adult consumers. The stages in the consumer socialization process are along a number of dimensions that capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision-making skills, and purchase strategies. The perceptual stage characterizes a general orientation towards the immediate and readily observable features of the marketplace. Children in this stage exhibit familiarity with concepts in the

marketplace, such as brands or retail stores, but rarely understand them beyond a surface level. Typically, a single perceptual dimension is the basis for many decisions. For example, children in this stage make choices based on a single, perceptually salient attribute like size.

Enormous changes take place, both cognitively and socially, as children move into the analytical stage. This period contains some of the most important developments in terms of consumer knowledge and skills. Concepts such as product categories and prices are thought of in terms of functional or underlying dimensions. Products and brands are analyzed and discriminated on the basis of more than one dimension or attribute, and generalizations are drawn from experience. Reasoning proceeds at a more abstract level, setting the stage for knowledge structures that include information about concepts like motives and contingencies.

The reflective stage characterizes further development in several dimensions of cognitive and social development. Knowledge about marketplace concepts such as branding and pricing becomes complex, as children develop sophisticated information processing and social skills. A distinct observation is the shift in orientation to a reflective way of thinking and reasoning, as children move into adolescence and focus on the social meanings and underpinnings of the consumer marketplace. A heightened awareness of other people's perspectives, along with a need to shape their own identity results in keen attention to the social aspects of being a consumer.

Advertising and Persuasion

Children's knowledge and understanding of advertising ignites interest in the area of consumer socialization. Beginning in the early 1970s, arguments emerged that advertising to children was inherently unfair. Theories conducted by consumer researchers revealed young children to have little understanding of the persuasive intent of advertising (Blatt, Spencer, & Ward, 1972; Ward, Reale, & Levinson, 1972). A public policy debate ensued, culminating in a 1978 Federal Trade Commission proposal to ban television advertising to young children less than eight years. Although this proposal was ultimately defeated, concern over what children know about advertising and whether advertisers have an unfair advantage in persuading children continues to this day. The important building blocks in understanding of advertising by children are the ability to distinguish commercials from programs and the ability to understand the persuasive intent in advertisements.

As children move into the preschool years, they learn to identify television commercials and distinguish them from other forms of programming. By the age of five, almost all children have acquired the ability to pick out commercials from regular television programming (Blosser & Roberts, 1985).

Understanding Advertising Intent

Parents, policy makers and marketers have concerns about the age at which children can understand advertising. The concept of *advertising literacy* (Young, 1986) offers an indication of what understanding indicates. Young suggests that, for children to understand advertising, they must realize there is a source deliberately creating television advertisements and be aware that this source intends to persuade an audience to purchase. This is a basic level of understanding and it becomes more complex as the child begins to comprehend who pays for advertisements, who makes them, and why they are present on certain channels. Kunkel (1992) suggests that understanding is apparent by seven to eight years old at the earliest. Prior to this, young children tend to view advertising as entertainment or as a form of unbiased information. At the age of seven or eight, children begin to see the persuasive intent of commercials, coming to terms with the fact that advertisers are trying to get people to buy something.

Similar age trends have been reported in much subsequent research, though additional factors have been identified that may moderate the specific age at which a child understands persuasive intent. Family environment also plays a role. Higher levels of understanding can be facilitated by parents with higher educational levels and by parents who take a strong consumer education role with their children (Robertson and Rossiter, 1974). Common to both types of families is a greater degree of parent child

interaction about advertising, though the interaction must have an educational component to be effective.

In addition to background factors, features of the methodology used to measure children's understanding of persuasive intent have also come under scrutiny. Researchers have questioned if using open ended questions requiring abstract thinking and verbalization, may result in an overly pessimistic view of what young children know about advertising intent.

Advertising Tactics and Appeals

Advertising knowledge of a more specific form, involving an understanding of what tactics and appeals are used by advertisers and why they are used, emerges much later in the developmental sequence as children approach early adolescence (Boush, Friestad, & Rose, 1994). Moore and Lutz (2000) provide an illustration of this developmental juncture in their research, involving in depth interviews with second graders and fifth graders. These researchers found that younger children related to advertisements primarily as a conduit of product information, evaluating specific commercials based upon their liking of the advertised product. In contrast, older children viewed advertisements in a more analytical nature, often focusing on creative content and execution. Knowledge of this nature continues to develop during adolescence, as documented by Boush, Friestad, & Rose (1994).

The Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory emphasizes the influence of the socialization agents. Moschis and Churchill (1979) found consumer socialization to be largely a social learning process rather than a cognitive development process. They suggested that the cognitive development model is a better predictor of the knowledge and ability of a child to function as a consumer in the marketplace, while the social learning model is a better predictor of attitudes and values. In the social learning view, according to Bandura (1971), a child is neither driven by inner forces, nor pushed by environmental factors. On the contrary, social learning is a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions, and is affected by vivid, symbolic and self regulatory processes. Bandura (1986) has argued that behavior and environmental events operate as interacting determinants in the social learning theory. As meanings relate to symbols, most external influences affect behavior through cognitive processes. There are four modes of thought in this process, namely *persuatory*, *logical*, *vicarious*, and *enactive*. These modes assess the adequacy of fit between thought and the results of actions. According to Bandura (1992), vicarious learning begins in infancy. Further, vicarious thought verification through comparisons with distorted television versions of social reality can foster shared misconceptions of people, places, or things (Bandura, 1986; Hawkins & Pingree, 1982).

The processes governing observational learning are, (a) attention processes, (b) representation processes, (c) behavioral production processes, and (d) motivational processes. Observational learning differs from the interpretations of contemporary learning, principally in the areas of response integration and cognitive functions (Bandura, 1971). It primarily focuses on how people organize behavioral elements to form new response patterns.

Advertising targeted towards adult consumers is seen to have an effect on children as well. Fischer, Schwartz, Richards, Goldstein and Rojas (1991) substantiated this fact in a highly publicized study, where 229 preschool children between the ages of three and six were tested for their recognition of cigarette brand logos. The logo of Old Joe Camel, the spokes person for Camel cigarettes, was widely recognized by 6-year-olds, in spite of cigarette advertising banned on television.

There is evidence showing that both children and adults can acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new patterns of behavior as a result of observing televised models (Bandura, 1969). An influential source of social learning is the abundant modeling provided in television, films, and other pictorial displays. Considering the large amount of time that people spend watching televised models, mass media plays an influential role in shaping behavior and social attitudes.

According to the Bobo doll study by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963), children acted more aggressively towards a doll after watching the aggressive behavior modeled

on television. On completion of this study, the researchers concluded that pictorial mass media, particularly television, might serve as an important source of social behavior. Children find the music, humor, and production conventions that predominate in commercials attractive, and hence tend to respond to them quite favorably. The most common theme or appeal employed in advertising for children is associating the product with fun and happiness, rather than providing any factual product related information (Atkin & Heald, 1977, Barcus, 1980; Kunkel & Gantz, 1992). Leiber (1998) agrees with this research study and further says that the use of animated characters effectively aids product recall in children. Using animated characters in commercials is common and Barcus (1980) noted that this pattern was predominant in cereal advertising, which frequently features animated spokes-characters. It is observed that advertisers use fun as a selling element, especially while marketing food for children. These advertisements include crazy, colors and flavors and popular animated characters like Bugs Bunny and Tweety Bird to target children.

The hypotheses derived from the literature review are as follow:

H1: There is greater brand recall among children when there is a presence of an animated spokes-character in advertisements.

H2: Advertisements with animated spokes-characters generate a higher degree of content recall among children, than those that do not have animated spokes-characters.

H3: Children recognize and understand the persuasive intent in advertisements when there is a presence of an animated spokes-character.

H4: The intent to purchase a product is stronger among children, when there is a presence of an animated spokes-character in advertisements.

H5: Children find animated spokes-characters in advertisements to be credible and appealing.

Research Methodology

The *experiment method* was used to test the hypotheses for this study. The purpose of the experiment method is to examine causality. This method is a type of quantitative research design conducted to explain relationships and clarify why certain events happen. A causal relationship examines the relationship between two variables, where one variable called the independent variable causes or determines the presence of the other variable called the dependent variable.

Development of Stimulus Materials

For the research study, four advertisements with animated spokes-characters and four advertisements with human spokes persons were chosen from two popular television channels, Cartoon Network and Nick Jr. To maintain uniformity, all advertisements (see Appendix A) were chosen with equal gender representation, and are classified under the general product category.

Sample Group

The researcher conducted the study with 100 children from Cadwallader School, in San Jose, California. The children were in the age groups of seven to nine years, and were equally represented by both male and female genders. The children viewed an animated movie - *Shrek*, into which the researcher had inserted the advertisements. *Shrek* is a popular movie among children and is 90 minutes long.

The subjects were tested on the advertisements viewed, using a questionnaire (see Appendix B). Groups of 10 children each were formed for better analysis. The researcher distributed the questions after the screening of the movie, thus ensuring sufficient time for each child to comprehend and interpret the advertisements. The questions related to different elements including recall of brand names, recall of content, recognition of scenes from advertisements, intent of the advertisements and credibility.

Measures and Methodology

To test brand recall and content recall, the children viewed the movie with the embedded advertisements. Each advertisement was shown once. The distribution of the advertisements within the movie was done almost equally with two advertisements at the beginning of the movie, two in the middle of the movie and three at the end of the movie.

Before the screening of the movie, the children were not informed that they would be asked to recall the embedded advertisements. After viewing the movie, the children were asked individually to recall the brand names of the products in the advertisements, by answering the questionnaire. Questions on the content of the advertisements tested the level of content recall.

To test the level of understanding of the advertisements, the researcher asked the children about the purpose of the different advertisements. This was a measure of the persuasive intent of the advertisements, as perceived by them.

The measure of credibility was determined by featuring animated spokes-characters in select advertisements. The children were asked to rate each spokes-character on a *Likert* scale from 1 (*least likeable*) to 5 (*very likeable*), for appeal.

Ohanian's (1990) three-part measure of source credibility was used in the study. This measure assesses perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source and is hence useful in understanding perceptions towards the spokes-characters in the advertisements. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed using *chi-square tests* and *t tests*.

Findings

Recall of Brand Names

The answers were marked correct if the children could recall the brand names of the products advertised. According to the results, products with advertisements containing animated spokes-characters were more than those advertisements with human spokes persons. This proved hypothesis H1. Chi-square tests were conducted and it was determined that the probability value of .039 reached significance beyond the .05 level for 2 degrees of freedom (chi-square = 6.5, d.f. = 2, $p < .05$). This indicated that there was a significant difference in recall due to the presence of animated spokes-characters, when compared to human spokes persons.

In terms of percentages, 25% of the sample could not recall the brand names of any of the advertisements. Forty five percent of the sample could recall the brands of advertisements, which had animated spokes-characters only (see table 1). The recall of advertisements with human spokes persons was 20%. Interestingly, advertisements containing either animated spokes-characters or human spokes-characters, where music was predominant, received the highest brand recall. Macaroni and Cheese and Caprisun drink were such advertisements.

Table 1

Results on brand recall of products

	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons	No answer
Brand recall (n=100)	45%	30%	25%

Recall of Advertising Content

The results for recall of advertising content supported hypothesis H2. Each child was asked questions on the content of the advertisements. The questions were answered with a yes or no response. Chi-square tests were conducted and it was determined that the probability value of the chi square value reached 10.32 with probability less than .05 for 2 degrees of freedom (chi-square = 10.32, d.f. = 2, $p > .05$). This indicated that there was a significant difference between recall of advertisements containing animated spokes-characters and those with human spokes persons. Advertisements of Macaroni and Cheese and Caprisun drink were recalled most in this test for advertising content, with a percentage of 41% (see table 2).

Table 2

Results on content recall

	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons	No answer
Brand recall (n=100)	50%	41%	9%

Understanding the Persuasive Intent of the Advertisements

This test was conducting by asking open ended questions regarding the persuasive intent of the advertisements. According to the chi-square tests, the chi square value is 9.68. The probability value is .039 and reached significance beyond the .05 level for 2 degrees of freedom (chi-square = 9.68, d.f. = 2, $p > .05$). The subsequent results indicate that there is no significant difference between the advertisements featuring animated spokes-characters and those featuring human spokes persons.

The following results illustrate the four categories of the answers provided by the children. Responses like “to catch your attention” and “to convince people to buy things” were categorized under the category of “to persuade.” Thirty-five percent of the sample agreed that advertisements aimed at persuading consumer to buy products.

Responses like “to show you what’s invented, what’s new” were categorized under the category of “to inform.” Responses like “to get time to go to the toilet, or give you a chance to get a drink” were categorized under the category of “to amuse, for a break.” Eleven percent of the children were unable to answer the question about the persuasive intent of the advertisements and did not answer (see table 3).

Table 3

Results on persuasive intent

N=100	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons
To inform	35%	33%
To amuse, for a break	25%	28%
To persuade	35%	33%
No answer	5%	6%

Purchase Intent

There was a stronger intent to purchase the product, when advertisements featured animated spokes-characters, compared to those that did not, thus supporting hypothesis H4. The chi square value for recognition is 11.61 with probability less than .01 for 2 degrees of freedom (chi-square =11.61, d.f. =2, $p < .01$). Sixty five percent of the subjects conceded to buy the product. Table 4 provides the details of the results of this test.

Table 4

Percentage of responses on the purchase intent

	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons	No answer
Purchase intent (n=100)	60%	35%	5%

Credibility and Appeal

Questions that elicited answers on a Likert Scale were analyzed using t tests. This test comprises of a number of procedures concerned with comparing two averages and can be used to compare the difference between two groups. The probability in the study

was less than 0.05 (see table 5). The difference in such a case was significant and was not caused by chance.

Table 5

T test analysis for credibility and appeal

	Mean scores		T value	Degrees of freedom
	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons		
Appeal	3.89	3.82	0.03	39
Credibility	2.32	3.82	-0.54	38

The results showed that the credibility and appeal of advertisements with animated spokes-characters was almost the same as that with human spokes persons. Consequently, hypothesis H5 was refuted. Table 6 illustrates the results with the percentages of the responses.

Table 6

Percentage of responses on credibility and appeal

	Animated spokes-characters	Human spokes persons	No answer
Credibility and appeal (n=100)	26%	25%	49%

Conclusions and Discussions

The results of this study reveal the response of children to animated spokes-characters in advertisements, with respect to brand recall, content recall, purchase intent, credibility, and appeal. Further, the results emphasize on the persuasive nature of advertising on children.

Recall has long been considered a measure of advertising effectiveness. Although the presence of animated spokes-characters is an important factor in brand recall, the existence of other factors like music and interactivity is also significant for attracting the attention of children. Children begin to recall brand names and advertisement content if they are associated with salient visual cues such as favorite characters, colors, pictures and music. As children grow up, advertisements are viewed analytically and the focus is on creative content and execution. In addition, as observed in the findings, advertisements that semantically suggest a product benefit, also lead to a greater recall (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998) and tend to generate above average levels of awareness. In addition, brands with higher related recall not only tend to generate higher awareness but also increase sales volumes. Concurring with brand recall, the recall for advertising content is seen more in the case of animated spokes-characters.

According to the results, children recognize advertisements with animated spokes-characters to a greater deal, than those with human spokes persons. This is because animated spokes-characters are popular, attractive, and targeted at children. The easy

memorization of these advertisements is attributed to the fact that children are familiar to the product advertised, and the multiple times these advertisements are watched.

Advertisements make a big impression on the minds of children. Results indicate that the presence of an animated spokes character or a human spokes person is not a significant factor to interpret the persuasive intent of the advertisements. Although the results for brand recall and advertisement content recall are high in the case of the presence of animated spokes-characters, the persuasive intent of advertisements was the same in the case of advertisements with animated spokes-characters and human spokes persons. According to the findings, a majority of children feel that the main intent of advertisements is to persuade the viewer to purchase the product. This reveals that children understand the intent of advertisements, irrespective of the product endorsed by an animated spokes character or a human spokes person. Interestingly, children think that advertisements with animated spokes character act as both informers and persuaders. According to the data, the credibility of the endorsers in the case of advertisements with animated spokes-characters and human spokes persons remained the same.

The impact of television advertising on children's behavior depends on many complex processes, and there is often a discrepancy between viewer attention and attitudes toward advertising and actual buying behavior. Although children understand the persuasive intent of advertising, the intent to purchase the product is more in the case of products endorsed by animated spokes-characters. The findings related to purchase

intent are similar to the ones related to brand recall and content recall. The ability to remember is also high, which indicates that there is a high probability of buying the product. This may be because advertisements with animated characters are creative and children are familiar with the products advertised by animated characters than human spokes persons. The intent to purchase depends on whether or not the commercial message has provided the viewer with information, which is perceived as important and personally relevant. It also plays a strong role in determining whether behavioral effects will follow from advertising.

The researcher concludes that animated spokes-characters play a significant role in advertisements targeted towards children. Children relate to advertisements primarily as a conduit of product information, evaluating specific commercials based upon their liking and familiarity with the animated spokes-character. Further, television advertising influences children's attitudes and behavior and suggest that the type of commercial format used is important in influencing a child's product selection behavior.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are as follow:

1. This study has the same limitations as any experimental research project. It is not a real world experience. Consequently, long-term effects cannot be assessed and behavior can be measured only by what participants say they might do. On the other hand, with an experimental design, one can control variables, settings and subjects by

changing only the test variables. The tests can be administered in the same way, in the same type of setting, and by randomly assigning participants to treatment groups. The results of this study provide a starting point for future research that might look more specifically at long-term effects of commercials and actual buying behaviors of audiences.

2. There was a break of 20 minutes while watching the movie with the embedded advertisements. There is a possibility of a loss of momentum among the subjects, in relating to the advertisements and answering the questions later.

Recommendations for Future Study

The recommendations for future study are as follow:

1. To investigate further the factors, which influence the popularity of advertisements, due to the presence of animated spokes-characters and their effect on children.

2. To understand the thinking of children in terms of discussing the persuasive intent of advertising and related issues in terms of making of, and paying for advertisements. Additional factors could include the perception of children regarding the truthfulness of the advertisements.

3. To explore children's understanding of television advertisements in detail and establish what misconceptions they have. A clearer picture of children's knowledge and

experience will enable researchers to suggest the most appropriate and effective interventions to help children understand the purpose of advertising.

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Appendix A

Scripts of Advertisements

1. Macaroni & Cheese advertisement features a Dinosaur who is a celebrity. The dinosaur comes to Noodle Town where he performs on stage amidst cheers from a group of children. After the stage show, the dinosaur travels in a train with the children and then leaves Noodle Town in a limousine waving at the children.

2. Froot Loops advertisement features a volcanic eruption, which causes a bird to lose all the colors from its feathers. The bird is worried and consults its cousins on finding a solution to get back its colors. In the end, the bird eats the Froot Loops cereal and gets back the colors on its feathers.

3. Trix Yogurt advertisement shows a game show in which a rabbit is participating. The rabbit is in disguise and answers questions put forth by the hosts of the game show. When he suddenly sees a can of Trix Yogurt, his disguise falls, much to the amazement of the spectators.

4. Fruit Loops advertisement shows a teenaged boy skateboarding with a pack of Froot Loops candy. Soon other teenagers start skateboarding and try to snatch the candy packet from the boy. All of a sudden, a girl comes on her skateboard and snatches the packet, much to the amazement of the others.

5. Caprisun drink advertisement features a boy getting a message on his cell phone from his friends asking him to contact them immediately. Soon the boy and his friends skate board through the tunnels and over the mountains to a secluded island where they all drink Caprisun.

6. Kellogg's cereal advertisement shows a boy and a girl having breakfast while watching television. The television shows the image of a young boy in a tent in a camping ground trying to flee the campground. The boy in the campground stuffs his backpack with things and tries not to wake the sleeping warden. The boy and girl watching the television try to imitate him and have Kellogg's cereal.

7. Reese Chocolate advertisement features a young man walking into a mall eating Reese chocolate. As he walks into the mall, people around him give him puzzling looks, much to his surprise. Once he finishes his bar of chocolate, he realizes that his hair has turned spiky and his clothes torn because of the effect of the chocolate.

8. Cheetos advertisement features a tiger walking in to a classroom as a substitute teacher. The tiger talks to the students about the new spiraled Cheetos. The students are keen to know more about the product and are excited when the tiger talks to them.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Advertisement 1

Macaroni and Cheese

1. The name of the town in the advertisement is Noodle town.

Yes No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the dinosaur?					
How truthful is the dinosaur?					

Advertisement 2

Fruit Loops

1. The kids in the advertisement are skate boarding.

Yes No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the boys in the advertisement?					
How much do you like the girls in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 3

Fruit Loops

1. There are 4 birds in the advertisement.

Yes

No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the bird in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 4

Trix Yogurt

1. The rabbit in the advertisement is participating in a game show.

Yes

No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the rabbit in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 5

Caprisun drink

1. The boy in the advertisement gets the message on his cell phone.

Yes

No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the boy in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 6

Kellogg's Smorz cereal

1. The boy in the advertisement is in a tent in the camping ground.

Yes

No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the boy in the advertisement?					
How appealing is the girl in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 7

Reese Chocolate

1. The boy in the advertisement is in a park.

Yes No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the tiger in the advertisement?					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Advertisement 8

Cheetos

1. The tiger in the Cheetos advertisement is a substitute teacher

Yes

No

2. What does the advertisement want you to do?

Answer:

	1	2	3	4	5
How much do you like the girl in the advertisement					
How truthful is the advertisement?					

Appendix C
IRB Approval Letter

San José State
UNIVERSITY

**Office of the Academic
Vice President**
Academic Vice President
Graduate Studies and Research

One Washington Square
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To: Rashmi Shyam
390 Elan Village Lane, # 109
San Jose, CA 95134

From: Pam Stacks,
Interim Academic Vice-President
Graduate Studies & Research

Date: July 30, 2003

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"Children and Television Advertising: The Effectiveness of
Spokes Characters in Advertisements."

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Pam Stacks immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subjects portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond July 30, 2004 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc: Dr Cecelia Baldwin