

## Ethics of Advertising to Children in the Saudi Context: Cheat or Treat

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore parents' attitudes toward various ethical aspects of advertising to children, based on empirical investigation in the Saudi context. Within a non-probability sampling scheme, the study used a "Mall intercept" approach to collect the required data from a usable sample of 437 parents, located in major shopping malls in the city of Jeddah, using the drop-off method. The main findings show that Saudi parents were generally favorable about certain ethical aspects of advertising to their children, such as promoting appropriate products, while they were concerned about other aspects, such as message credibility and disclosure of necessary information. The study concluded with appropriate implications and recommendations.

**Keywords:** advertising, ethics, message, content, parents, children.

### INTRODUCTION

In modern and media-driven societies, children create a tremendous buying power, and yet represent the most vulnerable group of all media audiences. Very often, advertisers try to sell more than just items. They promote modern lifestyles and desires for entitlement (Alsmadi, 2005). Targeting children in advertising creates a tremendous challenge in modern marketing, which puts corporate social responsibility of businesses at stake. Today, public policy makers and various stakeholder groups watch carefully marketing conduct with respects to advertising. Many critics question advertising tactics that are employed by marketers to target children. The majority of advertisements seem to instill in children a strong desire for entitlement of many

unnecessary items, and yet dissatisfaction with current ones (Clow and Back, 2012). In many cases, some exploitive advertising tactics are used to push products to children (Shimp and Andrews, 2013). In this environment, many children are victimized by deceptive or misleading commercials for items- like toys, games, sugary sweets, fatty crisps ...etc. They just find themselves under temptation to buy flashy items, even without telling their parents. Under strong temptation, however, they often exert pressure on their parents to buy items for which they have no real need (Alsmadi and Melhem, 1999). Obesity, among other problems, is a serious side effect of this consumption culture. Several studies noted a linkage between exposure to food advertising and child obesity (for example, Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2006; Taveras et al, 2006; Strasburger, 2001). Another side effect of this unhealthy consumption culture is unfortunate injury caused by items bought through misleading advertising. Parents' awareness of socially responsible advertising, however, may not be good enough in the absence of strict regulations of advertising to vulnerable groups like children. In the USA, for example, the CARU (Children

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Advertising Review Unit) has the following six guidelines for advertising to children (Clow and Back, 2012): 1. *Ads for toys should not create unreasonable expectation*; 2. *Toys should look and act as they would if a child was playing with it*; 3. *Ads should not blur between fantasy and reality*; 4. *Ads should have clear and visible disclosures about what items come with a toy and what do not*; 5. *Items that require adult supervision must be shown with adults supervising the child*; and 6. *Products and advertising content should be appropriate for children*. Very often, the whole issue of advertising to children raises much concern world-wide, though receives little attention in many developing countries. This study explores this issue in the Saudi context, focusing on parents' views through empirical research work.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study addresses ethical issues of advertising to children from parents' point of view in the context of Saudi Arabia. Based on empirical investigation, the study surveys Saudi parents' attitudes towards four pertaining ethical issues- adapted from the guidelines for advertising to children in United States "Children Advertising Review Unit" (Clow and Back, 2012). These issues, referred to as "**study dimensions**" thereafter, include:

D1. Appropriateness of advertised products to children;

D2. Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture;

D3. Disclosure of necessary product-related information; and

D4. Informational credibility of advertising content.

In subsequent stages of the analysis, the study examines if these attitudes could vary by parent demographic variables, such as income, gender, age, and education.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In view of the research purpose outlined above, this study seeks to answer the following major questions with regards to advertising to children in Saudi Arabia:

Q1. Do advertisers promote appropriate products to children (i.e. safe and healthy products)?

Q2. How considerate is advertising content to the Saudi culture (i.e. culture-friendly language or pictures)?

Q3. Do advertisers clearly disclose necessary product-related information in the advertising message (i.e. need for adult supervision)?

Q4. How far is the perceived credibility of informational content of advertising (i.e. truthful claims and factual information)?

Q5. Are there significant differences in parents' attitudes ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) toward advertising ethics (regarding the above four issues) due to their demographic characteristics (gender, age, income, education).

#### **CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

The current study is unique by the virtue of its nature and empirical investigation as it addresses Saudi parents' attitudes toward critical aspects of ethics in advertising to children. This reflects how consumers in conservative Arab cultures respond to advertising contents and the resulting impact on public attitudes. In particular, the findings of the current study are expected to help marketers and advertising agencies improve their understanding of consumer attitudes in the Saudi context, thus design more effective advertising strategies directed at children. Also, public policy makers and legislative bodies may draw on such findings in drafting more appropriate advertising guidelines pertaining to child-related advertising in the Saudi context. Moreover, the study opens up venues for further research investigation in relevant subject areas, particularly for other cultural contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern societies, children play an important role in the buying behavior of their families, thus become a significant target of advertisers (Bandyopadhyay, S., 2001). Advertising to children has long been a controversial issue in marketing communications which elicits much debate world-wide (Bakir A. and Vitell, J. 2010). Several ethical concerns, therefore, come up to the surface and social responsibility becomes at stake. In fact, advertisers are expected to show a strong sense of social responsibility when children are targeted by their campaigns. Theoretically, the societal marketing concept is viewed as a business philosophy that relies on three main dimensions: 1. *profit*, 2. *customer satisfaction*, and 3. *society interest*. In practice, however, it is the third dimension that is often the weakest. Thus, much controversy and debate surround the issue of social responsibility of businesses (for example, Pol, P. K. C. and Bakker, F. G. A., 2009). Churchill and Peter (1995) looked at social responsibility as an organization's acceptance of accountability to society for its actions and that marketing ethics are standards of business conduct. That is, as part of a society, marketers are held responsible to that society for their behavior (Kerin et al, 2009). In the same vein, social responsibility is viewed as a marketer's responsibility to handle relevant public policy and social issues (Windsor, 2006). Besides moral obligation, commitment to social responsibility can be justified on three grounds as 1. sustainability; 2. license to operate, and; 3. business reputation (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Pride and Ferrell (2010) took a different perspective by defining three categories of a business's social responsibility as: 1. environmental responsibility; 2. consumerism; and 3. community relations, of which focus is to create and enhance a positive image of the role and contribution of a business to a community. In practice, however, Alsmadi (2010) maintained that much debate seems to surround marketing ethics, as a particular

marketing behavior could be acceptable by some businesses, and yet unacceptable by others. In that, marketing ethics can sometimes be subjectively judged by the situation, thus good judgment is always paramount. This view was shared by Zinkhan (1994), who concluded that, in difficult ethical choices, one could turn for guidance to personal conscience, company policies, industry standards, laws and regulations, and religion. In the same vein, Alsmadi (2012) contended that a certain marketing behavior can be viewed as ethical in one culture, while rejected in another. Alsmadi believed that societal culture may provide an umbrella under which a marketing behavior is viewed and understood. Obviously, the argument on marketing ethics, particularly in grey areas, arises because of relative disagreement on the nature and scope of social responsibility, given the diversity of business values in different cultures. Today, survival in the turbulent business environment has much to do with adherence to a high standard of social responsibility. For example, ethical marketing behavior can be evidenced in new ways, such as treating children in advertising messages in ways that support parents' efforts. One study noted that children were likely to think differently than adults, though at a disadvantage to recognize differences between child programs and commercials and the selling intents behind commercials. The same study found that solutions to ethical advertising problems would always come from organizations themselves (Haefner, 1991). Kotler and Keller (2012) revealed that marketers who did not behave ethically would be easily exposed. They continued that, in the past, a disappointed consumer used to spread a negative word-of-mouth to only few other people. Today, a consumer could reach millions of people through various social media channels. This, however, calls for a sustainable marketing in which socially responsible behavior is essential for meeting current consumers' needs, while looking at the interests of future generations, and for

which good marketing ethics is a cornerstone (Armstrong and Kotler, 2013). A French study, which examined advertising messages targeting children in view of the Hofstede's cultural model, concluded that people in individualistic cultures were likely to be affected by advertising messages that addressed positive outcomes after consuming the advertised product, while those in collectivistic cultures were likely to be affected more by advertising messages that addressed negative outcomes that could be avoided by consuming the advertised product (Hota, M. et al, 2010). One empirical study, which examined the African experience of advertising to children, concluded that children were interested in advertising messages that featured entertaining elements (i.e. children characters, cartoon, music, celebrities, and humor), hence they viewed such messages as a source of entertainment. In the meantime, they were likely to avoid advertising messages that featured pain and fear. The study also noted that local culture was an important input in the design of advertising strategy, thus, a critical element in marketing decision-making. Another noteworthy finding of the same study was that attractive advertising messages were capable of pushing children to pester their parents and get them buy promoted items, which raised several ethical issues, particularly in situations where parents had limited buying power (Gbadamosi, A. et al, 2012). Another study, which tackled the issue of parents' views on advertising to children in America, reported that parents were concerned about the potential harm of food advertising targeting children, thus called for more strict regulations in the advertising industry (Bakir A. and Vitell, J. 2010). A Canadian study, which addressed a growing concern of increased childhood obesity and its associated risks in the Canadian province of Quebec, examined the effect of banning junk food advertising targeting children. The study estimated that the ban would reduce fast-food consumption by US\$88 million per year (Dhar, T. and baylis, K. 2011). In a critical study of

advertising to children, Preston (2005) believed that Children, over the age of seven, were not naïve as they recognized the advertising's selling intents. As such, they were interested in advertising, not because of its economic socialization role, but rather because they wanted to know brand meanings for them. The study also noted that parents were not happy to disappoint their beloved children by constant denial of their demands. Rather, advertising was viewed as an opportunity to express love and passion to their children through buying advertised items (Preston, Ch., 2005). Preston came up with supporting evidence suggesting that the issue of children vulnerability was not very convincing and that advertising to children was viewed as an economic necessity, thus required appropriate regulations (Preston, 2004). A study that explored the impact of some antecedent variables on children's behavioral responses to online advertising, in South Korea, found that children with high skepticism toward online advertising were more likely to have unfavorable attitudes toward online advertising and less likely to reveal personal information to online marketers. The study also indicated that parents' knowledge regarding online advertising was lower than that of their children (Shin, W. et al, 2012).

Clearly, Advertising to children is a sensitive and emotional issue world-wide because, at least partly, children are vulnerable and can be easily misled. In particular, children's advertising is viewed as powerful enough to push children to demand things they do not need and also put unnecessary pressure on their parents to buy advertised items. For instance, the evidence, as revealed in the literature, suggests that food advertising to children is very effective in inducing food consumption, along with increasing rates of obesity. Several studies called for tougher restrictions on advertising to children. One particular study suggested that, despite practical difficulties, any successful anti-obesity strategy would be based on reducing screen time,

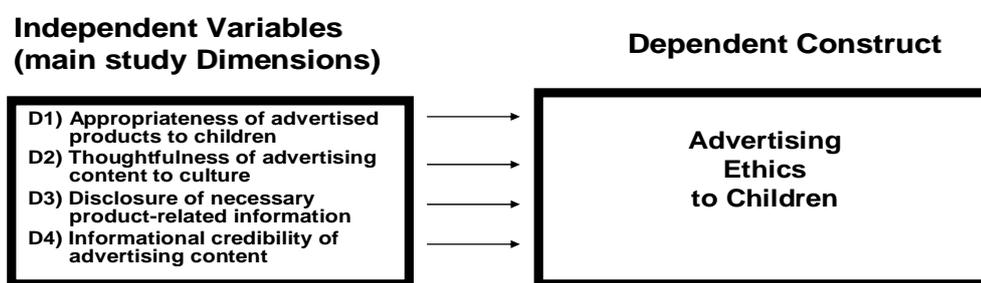
getting food marketing out of schools, and cleaning up the internet (Schor, J. and Ford, M., 2007). Moreover, it has been made very clear that children, given their vulnerability, are more involved than ever in media and shopping. Most studies, however, called for a more strict regulation of advertising to children with higher ethical standards and stronger sense of social responsibility. Consequently, the whole issue of children's advertising

has raised much concern and debate among public policy makers, marketers, and various stakeholder groups in modern economies.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Below is a graphical view of the theoretical framework for the current study:

## Theoretical Framework of the study



### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

To address the overall purpose of this study, with the four major research questions outlined earlier, and given a review of relevant literature, the following hypotheses are developed regarding parents in the study area (Jeddah- Saudi Arabia):

H1. Parents believe that advertisers promote appropriate products to their children.

H2. Parents believe that children's advertising content is considerate to local culture.

H3. Parents believe that children's advertising messages disclose necessary product-related information.

H4. Parents believe that informational content of children's advertising is credible.

H5. There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics- as outlined in the above four issues- due to their demographic

characteristics (gender, age, income, and education). Significance is tested at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). This general hypothesis is broken down by demographic variables as:

H5.1. There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to gender.

H5.2. There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to age.

H5.3. There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to income.

H5.4. There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to education.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population of this study includes Saudi parents, in the city of Jeddah, whose children were in the age group 3-11 years old. Children, within this age group, are physiologically expected to have developed language

and conceptualization skills, thus begin to use logical thinking to address concrete problems (Wadsworth, 1971). Also, they begin to develop awareness of visual and auditory cues signifying interpretation of advertisements, though still have some difficulties in distinguishing and understanding logical differences (Wartella and Ettema, 1974).

Within a non-probability sampling approach, the "Mall Intercept" technique was used for data collection.

A total of (500) questionnaire copies were conveniently delivered to parents in major shopping malls in the city of Jeddah, filled out, then collected, using the Drop-off method (Aaker et al, 2004). After checking and cleaning the data before the analysis stage, the usable sample size was found (437) parents, which brought the response rate to (87%). Table (1) shows the demographical distribution of the usable study sample.

**Table 1. Demographic distribution of the study sample**

Variable	Category	Frequency	percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	189	43.2
	Female	248	56.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age</b>	18-35 years	227	51.9
	36-50 years	169	38.7
	Over 50 years	41	9.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Income (monthly)</b>	Below SR 10000	214	49.0
	SR 10000-30000	157	35.9
	Over SR 30000	66	15.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education level</b>	High school or below	112	25.6
	Diploma/ bachelor degree	267	61.1
	Postgraduate degree	58	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100.0</b>

n= 437

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND MEASUREMENT

The required data for this study was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire, which was developed for this purpose (Table 2). The questionnaire contains four main parts, which measure parents' attitudes towards four pertaining ethical issues (outlined in the purpose of the study as "study dimensions"),

adapted from the guidelines for advertising to children in United States "Children Advertising Review Unit" (Clow and Back, 2012). The questionnaire also includes questions on demographic characteristics (gender, age, income, and education). In later stages of the analysis, the study examines if parent attitudes could vary by these demographics. Each part in the questionnaire is

dedicated to one Dimension. Several attitude statements were developed for each dimension (Table 2). Five-Point Likert scale of agreement was used for measurement, running from strongly disagree up to strongly agree, with a neutral category being a scale mid-point

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and, 5=strongly agree). The measuring statements were stated positively, thus the higher the attitude mean score the more favorable the attitude, and vice versa.

**Table 2. Attitude statements of the four issues of children's advertising ethics (main study Dimensions)**

<b>D1. Appropriateness of advertised products to children</b>
1- advertised products are safe to my children
2- advertised products are healthy to my children
3- advertised products sell at reasonable prices
4- advertised products help develop child skills
<b>D2. Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture</b>
5- advertising messages use acceptable pictures and drawings
6- advertising messages use suitable language to my children
7- advertising messages use familiar concepts to my children
8. all elements in the advertising message are culture-friendly
<b>D3. Disclosure of necessary product-related information</b>
9- advertising messages clearly disclose appropriate child age for the product
10- advertising messages clearly disclose undesirable side effects of products
11- advertising messages clearly disclose expiry date of products
12- advertising messages clearly disclose product's price
13- advertising messages clearly disclose usage instructions
14- advertising messages clearly disclose warranty information
15- advertising messages clearly disclose a need for adult supervision when necessary
16- advertising messages clearly disclose disposal information
<b>D4. Informational credibility of advertising content</b>
17- claims made in advertising messages are real
18- information used in advertising messages is factual
19- promises made in advertising messages are fulfilled
20- advertising messages focus on facts and important information

#### **VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT**

The final stage of the questionnaire development involved a pilot work to assess its Content Validity and

Reliability. The Content Validity was evaluated through a small-scale pilot survey, which involved specialists, industry experts, and advertising practitioners. Their

comments were taken into consideration in drafting the final version. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency, which revealed a high overall reliability correlation value ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), as shown in Table (3), with alpha values

for individual dimensions falling in the range of (0.75) to (0.85). From a methodological point of view, the measuring instrument in this study (questionnaire) is scientifically accepted ( $\alpha \geq 0.60$ ), both at the individual dimension level and the instrument as a whole.

**Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency coefficients for all study Dimensions**

Domain (Dimension)	Alpha value	Items No
A- Appropriateness of advertised products	0.76	4
B- Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	0.75	4
C- Disclosure of necessary product-related information	0.85	8
D- Informational credibility of adv. content	0.85	4
<b>Instrument as a whole</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>20</b>

n= 437

## STATISTICS AND BASES FOR HYPOTHESES TESTING

Various statistics were used for data analysis, including Descriptive statistics (i.e. means and standard deviations), Reliability Correlation using Cronbach's Alpha, Multiple Regression, and Multiple Analysis Of Variance "MANOVA". The five-point Likert scale was divided into two scoring areas as: "low mean scoring", indicating low favorable attitude ( $1 \leq \text{mean score} < 3$ ); and "high mean scoring", indicating high favorable attitude ( $3 \leq \text{mean score} \leq 5$ ). Obviously, 3 is the scale midpoint. That is, the higher the mean score (MS) the higher the favorableness of the attitude and vice versa. With regards to testing the four separate hypotheses (H1 through H4), Interaction Multiple Regression analysis was applied based on statistical significance of (t), along with (t) values and Beta values. Statistical significance of (t) for individual Dimensions in the Regression model should indicate acceptance of relevant hypothesis and vice versa. For hypotheses (H5), MANOVA technique was used to test mean differences among demographic variables (gender, age, income, and

education groups) based on (5%) significance level. That is, we accept the null hypothesis if the statistical significance is greater than (5%), and vice versa.

## RESULTS

### D1. "APPROPRIATENESS OF ADVERTISED PRODUCTS TO CHILDREN"

Table (4) describes mean scores, standard deviations, ranks, and scoring areas for the attitude statements that were used in measuring the first study Dimension (D1) "Appropriateness of advertised products to children". Results in the Table reveal that parents were generally favorable about the whole ethical issue represented in D1 as the overall mean score for the whole Dimension was above scale midpoint (3.35), with low standard deviation value (0.86), indicating relatively little dispersion around the mean. As can be seen in the Table, all the four attitude statements, under this Dimension, were favorable, with the highest mean score being (3.61), relating to the statement "advertised products are safe to my children", While the lowest mean score was (3.20), relating to the statement "advertised products help

develop child skills". Overall, this indicates that parents' attitudes were relatively positive about the ethical issues

relating to product safety, health, reasonable price, and the potential for developing child skills

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics for attitude statements measuring D1 (Appropriateness of advertised products to children), listed in a descending order according to Mean Score value**

Rank	D1: Items	Mean Score <sup>1</sup> (MS)	Standard Deviation	Scoring area <sup>2</sup> (Attitude Favorableness)
1	advertised products are safe to my children	3.61	1.09	Fav. Attitude
2	advertised products are healthy to my children	3.42	1.13	Fav. Attitude
3	advertised products sell at reasonable prices	3.23	1.13	Fav. Attitude
4	advertised products help develop child skills	3.20	1.08	Fav. Attitude
<b>Dimension as a whole</b>		<b>3.35</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>Fav. Attitude</b>

<sup>1</sup>maximum score = (5)

n=437

<sup>2</sup>High scoring (MS≥3) indicates Favorable Attitude and Low scoring (MS<3) indicates Unfavorable Attitudes.

**D2. "THOUGHTFULNESS OF ADVERTISING CONTENT TO CULTURE"**

Table (5) describes mean scores, standard deviations, ranks, and scoring areas for the attitude statements that were used in measuring the second study Dimension (D2) "Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture". Figures in the Table show that parents were generally favorable about the whole ethical issue involved in D2 as the overall mean score for the whole Dimension was above scale mid-point (3.30), with relatively low standard deviation (0.79), reflecting little dispersion around the mean. The Table reveals that all the four

attitude statements, under this Dimension, were favorable, with the highest mean score being (3.50), relating to the statement "advertising messages use acceptable pictures and drawings", whereas the lowest mean score (3.07) was noted for the statement "all elements in the advertising message are culture-friendly". In general, the Table shows that attitudes were relatively positive about the advertising content regarding acceptance of pictures and drawings, suitability of used language, familiarity of concepts, and culture-friendly content.

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics for attitude statements measuring D2 (Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture), listed in a descending order according to Mean Score value**

Rank	D2: Items	Mean Score <sup>1</sup> (MS)	Standard Deviation	Scoring area <sup>2</sup> (Attitude Favorableness)
1	advertising messages use acceptable pictures and drawings	3.50	1.02	Fav. Attitude
2	advertising messages use suitable language to my children	3.43	0.97	Fav. Attitude
3	advertising messages use familiar concepts to my children	3.31	0.99	Fav. Attitude
4	all elements in the advertising message are culture-friendly	3.07	1.13	Fav. Attitude
<b>Dimension as a whole</b>		<b>3.30</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>Fav. Attitude</b>

<sup>1</sup>maximum score = (5)

n=437

<sup>2</sup>High scoring (MS $\geq$ 3) indicates Favorable Attitude and Low scoring (MS $<$ 3) indicates Unfavorable Attitudes.

### **D3. "DISCLOSURE OF NECESSARY PRODUCT-RELATED INFORMATION"**

Table (6) describes mean scores, standard deviations, ranks, and scoring areas for the attitude statements that were used in measuring the third Dimension of the study (D3) "*Disclosure of necessary product-related information*". Generally, the Table reveals that parents were relatively unfavorable about most of the ethical issues outlined in this Dimension, as the overall mean

score for the whole Dimension was slightly below scale mid-point (2.76), with low standard deviation value (0.83), reflecting relatively little dispersion around the mean. In particular, one statement- out of the eight statements in this Dimension- received favorable attitude mean score (3.40), relating to "disclosure of appropriate child age in the advertising message". The other statements were viewed somehow unfavorably by parents.

**Table 6. Descriptive statistics for attitude statements measuring D3 (Disclosure of necessary product-related information), listed in a descending order according to Mean Score value**

Rank	D3: Items	Mean Score <sup>1</sup> (MS)	Standard Deviation	Scoring area <sup>2</sup> (Attitude Favorableness)
1	advertising messages clearly disclose appropriate child age for the product	3.40	1.19	Fav. Attitude
2	advertising messages clearly disclose usage instructions	2.94	1.12	Unfav. Attitude
3	advertising messages clearly disclose a need for adult supervision when necessary	2.92	1.17	Unfav. Attitude
4	advertising messages clearly disclose product's price	2.86	1.17	Unfav. Attitude
5	advertising messages clearly disclose expiry date of products	2.77	1.19	Unfav. Attitude
6	advertising messages clearly disclose warranty information	2.69	1.10	Unfav. Attitude
7	advertising messages clearly disclose undesirable side effects of products	2.51	1.18	Unfav. Attitude
8	<i>advertising messages clearly disclose disposal information</i>	2.36	1.26	Unfav. Attitude
<b>Dimension as a whole</b>		<b>2.76</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>Unfav. Attitude</b>

<sup>1</sup>maximum score = (5)

n=437

<sup>2</sup>High scoring (MS≥3) indicates Favorable Attitude and Low scoring (MS<3) indicates Unfavorable Attitudes.

**D4. "INFORMATIONAL CREDIBILITY OF ADVERTISING CONTENT"**

Table (7) describes mean scores, standard deviations, ranks, and scoring areas for the attitude statements that were used in measuring the fourth Dimension of the study (D4) "Informational credibility of advertising content". The analysis in this Table shows almost average favorableness about the informational credibility of advertising content, with an overall mean score for the Dimension as a whole being around scale mid-point (2.97), with relatively low standard deviation value (0.94), indicating little dispersion around the mean. As revealed in the Table, two out of the

four statements in this Dimension received relatively favorable attitudes, relating to "claims made in advertising messages are real" (3.14) and "information used in advertising messages is factual" (3.02). While the attitudes for the other two statements in this dimension were scoring relatively below scale mid-point. These were "advertising messages focus on facts and important information" (2.90) and "promises made in advertising messages are fulfilled" (2.84). Clearly, the overall picture in Table (7) suggests that most attitude mean scores for Dimension (4) are close to scale mid-point on both sides.

**Table 7. Descriptive statistics for attitude statements measuring D4 (Informational credibility of advertising content), listed in a descending order according to Mean Score value**

Rank	D4: Items	Mean Score <sup>1</sup> (MS)	Standard Deviation	Scoring area <sup>2</sup> (Attitude Favorableness)
1	claims made in advertising messages are real	3.14	1.17	Fav. Attitude
2	information used in advertising messages is factual	3.02	1.07	Fav. Attitude
3	advertising messages focus on facts and important information	2.90	1.20	Unfav. Attitude
4	promises made in advertising messages are fulfilled	2.84	1.08	Unfav. Attitude
<b>Dimension as a whole</b>		<b>2.97</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>Unfav. Attitude</b>

<sup>1</sup>maximum score = (5)

n=437

<sup>2</sup>High scoring (MS $\geq$ 3) indicates Favorable Attitude and Low scoring (MS $<$ 3) indicates Unfavorable Attitudes.

#### HYPOTHESES TESTING AND DISCUSSIONS

Multiple Regression analysis (Interaction) was applied (Table 8) for testing the four separate hypotheses (H1 through H4), as explained earlier in the methodology along with the decision rules. Results in Table (8) show a statistically significant effect of parent attitudes regarding the four study Dimensions together on Advertising Ethics to children, where (F) was found statistically significant with a value of (224.653). Also R shows strong correlation between the four Dimensions together and the Dependent Construct, while R<sup>2</sup> detected a total effect of (0.676) produced in the Dependent Construct. Dimension (3), however, was found the most effective on advertising ethics as revealed by the highest Beta value (0.373).

For hypothesis testing, Table (8) reveals that all of the four study Dimensions (Independent Variables) were found statistically significant. Accordingly, and based on

the decision rule outlined earlier in the methodology, all (H1 through H4) can be accepted with t values (7.485), (10.110), (11.143), and (4.721) respectively. Also, the Table shows relevant Beta values reflecting the individual effect of each Independent Variable on the Dependent Construct, with the highest effect being noted for Dimension 3.

Generally, caution must be exercised as most attitude mean scores in all the Dimensions were close to scale mid-point on either side. Implicitly, though, this suggests that advertisers and Saudi public policy makers will have to pay attention to all aspects of ethics in advertising to children, outlined in this study. For example, the analysis reveals relatively poor performance of advertising messages with regards to disclosure of important information to parents and credibility of advertising claims. Clearly, this calls for more attention to the informational content of advertising messages.

**Table 8. Results of Multiple Regression analysis for the effect of parents attitudes pertaining to the four Dimensions on the Dependent Construct\***

Independent variable	"t" value	"t" sig	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>	"F" value	"F" sig
Appropriateness of advertised products	7.485	0.000	0.255	0.822	0.676	224.653	0.00
Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	10.110	0.000	0.307				
Disclosure of necessary product-related information	11.143	0.000	0.373				
Informational credibility of adv. content	4.721	0.000	0.161				

\* Dependent Construct: Advertising Ethics to Children

(n=437)

**ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES**

**(testing H5)**

This section will assess differences, if any, in parents' attitudes due to their demographic variables (Gender, Age, Income, and Education) to address the last hypothesis (H5) of the study, using "MANOVA" analysis.

Table (9.A) shows results of "MANOVA" analysis to

assess differences in attitude mean scores of parents towards the four study Dimensions (D1 through D4), each Dimension as a whole, due to their demographic variables. Table (9-B) completes the picture by revealing results of descriptive statistics (i.e. Mean scores and Standard Deviations) for parent attitudes towards these Dimensions by demographic variable.

**Table 9.A. Results of "MANOVA" analysis for the four study Dimensions (D1 through D4), each Dimension as a whole, by parents' demographic variables.**

Demographic Var.	Dimension	Sum of square	Df	F value	Sig <sup>1</sup>
<b>Gender</b> F (1.793) Sig <sup>1</sup> (0.105)	Appropriateness of advertised products	4.859	1	6.991	0.009
	Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	0.921	1	1.487	0.224
	Disclosure of necessary product-related information	0.149	1	0.214	0.644
	Informational credibility of adv. content	2.143	1	2.765	0.098
<b>Age</b> F (1.470) Sig <sup>1</sup> (0.166)	Appropriateness of advertised products	2.713	2	1.951	0.144
	Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	0.390	2	0.315	0.730
	Disclosure of necessary product-related information	1.629	2	1.172	0.311
	Informational credibility of adv. content	5.193	2	3.350	0.037
<b>Income (monthly)</b> F (1.129)	Appropriateness of advertised products	3.736	2	2.687	0.070
	Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	1.930	2	1.558	0.212

Demographic Var.	Dimension	Sum of square	Df	F value	Sig <sup>1</sup>
Sig <sup>1</sup> (0.342)	Disclosure of necessary product-related information	1.498	2	1.077	0.342
	Informational credibility of adv. content	0.216	2	0.139	0.870
Education level F (1.417) Sig <sup>1</sup> (0.187)	Appropriateness of advertised products	2.684	2	1.931	0.147
	Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	0.052	2	0.042	0.959
	Disclosure of necessary product-related information	5.022	2	3.613	0.028
	Informational credibility of adv. content	0.667	2	0.430	0.651

<sup>1</sup> Statistical significance level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

n=437

**Table 9.B. Mean scores and Standard Deviations for parent attitudes towards the four study Dimensions (D1 through D4), each Dimension as a whole, by demographic variable.**

Dimension	Variable	Categories	Mean Scores	Standard. Deviation
(D1) Appropriateness of advertised products	Gender	Male	3.45	0.85
		Female	3.26	0.84
	Age	18-35 years	3.44	0.80
		36-50 years	3.21	0.88
		Over 50 years	3.39	0.92
	Income (monthly)	Below SR 10000	3.39	0.80
		SR 10000-30000	3.25	0.85
		Over SR 30000	3.60	1.07
	Education level	High school or below	3.30	0.86
		Diploma/ bachelor degree	3.39	0.84
Postgraduate degree		3.25	0.92	
(D2) Thoughtfulness of advertising content to culture	Gender	Male	3.24	0.85
		Female	3.36	0.75
	Age	18-35 years	3.34	0.77
		36-50 years	3.30	0.81
		Over 50 years	3.24	0.86
	Income (monthly)	Below SR 10000	3.37	0.72
		SR 10000-30000	3.25	0.82
		Over SR 30000	3.50	0.93
	Education level	High school or below	3.29	0.90
		Diploma/ bachelor degree	3.33	0.75

Dimension	Variable	Categories	Mean Scores	Standard. Deviation
		Postgraduate degree	3.30	0.80
<b>(D3) Disclosure of necessary product-related information</b>	<b>Gender</b>	Male	2.75	0.76
		Female	2.78	0.87
	<b>Age</b>	18-35 years	2.85	0.80
		36-50 years	2.68	0.80
		Over 50 years	2.70	1.06
	<b>Income (monthly)</b>	Below SR 10000	2.83	0.82
		SR 10000-30000	2.72	0.83
		Over SR 30000	2.74	0.98
	<b>Education level</b>	High school or below	2.87	0.90
		Diploma/ bachelor degree	2.80	0.80
Postgraduate degree		2.48	0.79	
<b>(D4) Informational credibility of advertising content</b>	<b>Gender</b>	Male	2.97	0.94
		Female	2.96	0.91
	<b>Age</b>	18-35 years	3.15	0.85
		36-50 years	2.80	0.93
		Over 50 years	2.81	1.08
	<b>Income (monthly)</b>	Below SR 10000	3.12	0.82
		SR 10000-30000	2.91	0.94
		Over SR 30000	2.87	1.17
	<b>Education level</b>	High school or below	3.05	0.87
		Diploma/ bachelor degree	3.01	0.90
Postgraduate degree		2.77	1.04	

n=437

### GENDER

The analysis in Table (9-A) shows that there is a statistically significant difference in parents' attitudes only towards (D1) "appropriateness of advertised products" due to gender (sig. 0.0009 with F value 6.991). No significant differences were detected for the other three Dimensions due to gender. From the analysis in

Table (9-B), it is clear that this difference is in favor of males (MS is 3.45 for males and 3.26 for females). In that, the males group was more favorable than that of females in terms of attitudes relating to the "appropriateness of advertised products" Dimension. However, the analysis of the four dimensions, as a whole, in Table (9-A) did not reveal significant

differences between males' and females' attitudes as both were likely to be consistent in terms of their views about the various ethical aspects of advertising to children in the Saudi context (sig. 0.105 with F value 1.793). Therefore, with respect to the four Dimensions as a whole, we can accept the null Hypothesis (H5-1), which states that "There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to gender".

#### AGE

The analysis in Table (9-A) shows that there is a statistically significant difference in parents' attitudes towards the "Informational credibility of advertising Content" due to age (sig. 0.037 with F value 3.350). No significant differences were detected for the other three Dimensions due to the age variable. To explore the places of this significant difference, Post-Hoc test (Scheffe) was applied, as shown in Table (10). The Table reveals that this significant difference is observed between the young age group ("18-35" years "with

MS=3.15"), and the middle age group ("36-50" years "with MS=2.80") in favor of the young group (Table 9-B reveals MS values). Clearly, the young people were likely to maintain a more favorable attitude than the other age groups did with regards to the "Informational credibility of advertising Content" Dimension. Probably, expectations of the older parents were obviously higher in terms of the credibility in advertising content than young parents did. However, the analysis of the four dimensions, as a whole, in Table (9-A), did not reveal significant differences among the age groups' attitudes (sig. 0.166 with F value 1.470). In that, parents in all age groups were likely to maintain consistent attitudes toward the various ethical aspects of advertising to children in the Saudi context. Therefore, with respect to the four Dimensions as a whole, we can accept the null Hypothesis (H5-2), which states "There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to age".

**Table 10. Results of (Scheffe) for "informational credibility of adv. content" Dimension due to age variable**

Age	Mean Scores (MS)	18-35 years	36-50 years	Over 50 years
18-35 years	3.15	-	0.35*	0.34
36-50 years	2.80		-	0.01-
Over 50 years	2.81			-

\* Differences are statistically significant at the level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

#### INCOME

Table (9.A) shows no statistically significant differences in parents' attitudes towards the four study Dimensions, both individually and as a whole (sig. 0.342 with F value 1.129). In that, parents in all income groups were consistent in terms of their attitudes toward the

various ethical aspects of advertising to children in the Saudi context. Therefore, with respect to the four Dimensions as a whole, we can accept the null Hypothesis (H5-3), which states "There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to income".

**EDUCATION**

Finally, the analysis in Table (9-A) reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in parents' attitudes towards the "Disclosure of necessary product-related information" due to education level (sig. 0.028 with F value 3.613). No significant differences were found in the other three Dimensions due to education. To explore the places of this significant difference, Post-Hoc test (Scheffe) was employed, as shown in Table (11). Figures in the Table reveal that this significant difference is observed between the "Postgraduate degree" level (with MS=2.48) and the "High school or below" level (with MS=2.87) in favor of the "High school or below" category (Table 9-B reveals MS values). Clearly, the less educated parents were more favorable about the current status of disclosure of

product information in advertising than the more educated parents did. Implicitly, this could indicate that the highly educated parents had higher aspirations regarding disclosure of product information in advertising than the less educated parents did, thus reality came short of their expectations. However, the overall analysis of the four dimensions, as a whole, in Table (9-A), did not reveal significant differences among the education groups' attitudes (sig. 0.187 with F value 1.417). In that, Saudi parents in all education categories were likely to maintain similar attitudes toward the advertising ethics. Therefore, with respect to the four Dimensions as a whole, we can accept the null Hypothesis (H5-4), which states "There is no significant difference in parents' attitudes toward advertising ethics due to education".

**Table 11. Results of (Scheffe) for "disclosure of necessary product-related information" Dimension due to education variable**

Education level	Mean Scores	High school or below	Diploma/ bachelor degree	Postgraduate degree
High school or below	2.87	-	0.07	0.39*
Diploma/ bachelor degree	2.80		-	0.32
Postgraduate degree	2.48			-

\* Differences are statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

**CONCLUSION**

The overall findings of this study revealed that Saudi parents were generally favorable about the various ethical issues of advertising to children, relating to the appropriateness of advertised products to children (such as product safety, health, reasonable price, and potential for developing child skills). Similarly, they were positive about the relevance of advertising content to local culture (such as acceptance of pictures and drawings, language suitability, concepts familiarity, and culture-friendly content). Meanwhile, the findings showed that

parents were somehow unfavorable about other ethical issues, such as disclosure of necessary information in advertising messages (such as usage instructions, need for adult supervision, prices, expiry date, warranty details, potential side effects). *Also, this attitude was noted for the informational* credibility of advertising content (i.e. doubtful promises made in the advertising message). Caution, though, must be exercised in interpreting these findings, particularly as attitudes were relatively favorable, with scoring just around average, which indicates that more work is still needed for

improving the overall ethical issues in advertising for children in the Saudi context. Perhaps, more attention is particularly required to the disclosure of necessary product information and credibility in advertising claims. Moreover, the findings suggest that advertisers should be advised to reconsider the way advertising content was developed and designed, given the vulnerability nature of their target group- children. In particular, credibility of advertising claims should be improved. Also, advertisers may develop a better understanding of consumer behavior in the study area, as revealed by the current study. Essentially, marketers and public policy makers should be more concerned about

the overall ethical aspects of advertising when targeting vulnerable groups like children. Furthermore, an appropriate code of advertising ethics is strongly recommended for the Saudi advertising industry, in addition to strict legislative framework. Overall, advertising standards, relating to children, must evolve to address various challenges and opportunities in consumer behavior. Finally, future research work may address advertising ethics by focusing particular attention on advertising makers and developers, rather than consumers, in the Saudi context and examine their concepts and philosophies.

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## أخلاقيات الإعلان التجاري الموجه للأطفال في البيئة السعودية: خداع أم تعامل صادق

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### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف اتجاهات الأهل (الآباء والأمهات) نحو الجوانب الأخلاقية المختلفة في الإعلانات التجارية الموجهة للأطفال وذلك بالاعتماد على منهج المسح الميداني في البيئة السعودية. وضمن إطار المعاينة غير الاحتمالية، استخدمت الدراسة أسلوب "المصادفة في المجمعات التجارية" لجمع البيانات من عينة بلغ حجمها 437 من الآباء والأمهات الذين تصادف وجودهم في مجمعات التسوق الرئيسية في مدينة جدة عند جمع البيانات، حيث تم استخدام طريقة التوزيع والجمع المباشر. بشكل عام، أظهرت أهم نتائج الدراسة أن الآباء والأمهات السعوديين راضين عن بعض الجوانب الأخلاقية في الإعلانات التجارية الموجهة لأطفالهم مثل ترويج السلع المناسبة، بينما كانوا قلقين حول جوانب أخرى مثل مصداقية محتوى الرسالة الإعلانية والإفصاح عن المعلومات الضرورية. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى تقديم التوصيات المناسبة مع الإشارة لبعض المضامين الهامة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الإعلان، الأخلاقيات، الرسالة، المحتوى، الأبوبين، الأطفال.

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