

## A Thematic Analysis of Children's Food Commercials on Nigerian TV Stations

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**KEYWORDS** Themes. Appeals. Children. Food. Advertising. Television

**ABSTRACT** The prevalence of diseases affecting children necessitates investigation into whether attitudes and behaviours portrayed in food advertising are influencing children's diets. Television food commercials aimed at children were examined to identify elements that may influence children's food socialisation. Qualitative content analysis method was used to provide a thematic analysis of messages contained in some selected food advertisements screened on Nigerian television stations in Lagos, Nigeria. The findings informed that the commercials adopted celebrity, music, adventure, rational and band wagon appeals to persuade the target audience. Besides, the themes of the advertisements focused on accomplishment and improved performance, exaggerated health claims, increased popularity, happiness and fun, as well as subtle derogation of core food. These elements are capable of altering children's experience of food and consequently their culture of food consumption.

### INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing what Dr. Frank Hu, of the Department of Nutrition and Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health called globalization of consumption pattern. The dietary pattern of many developing nations is shifting towards that of developed ones, supplanting traditional patterns of eating with a Western diet high in animal products and refined carbohydrates and low in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables (Hu 2008: 1913). An example is China, where consumption of animal products increased by nearly 40% between 1989 and 1997, and fast-food sales more than doubled between 1999 and 2005.

The result of this consumption pattern is obesity which has been associated with chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and some forms of cancer (WHO 1998). WHO (1998) noted that obesity is becoming prevalent all over the world including some developing countries with previously very low prevalence. Increase in obesity and related diseases have been tied to advertising. The argument is that children and adolescents are highly exposed to fast-food restaurant advertising, particularly on television where they get attracted to unhealthy foods (Fast Food Ads 2012). Sim-

ilarly, 70 percent of people chose a product based on a health or nutrition claim, which suggested that advertising, plays a major role (American Psychological Association n.d.).

Advertising has been viewed as a tool that generates some of the evils that are characteristic of the industrial society. It is argued that food advertising in particular is a phenomenon that encouraged disturbing trends as far as health is concerned because it promoted homogenization in diet, the consumption of foods that are hardly nutritious or are completely unhealthy, and disinformation about the characteristics, properties and functions of the goods they promote (Arnaiz 2001). On television, one advertisement quickly follows the other, so the audience processes very little of the information. It is, therefore, necessary to examine how these promotions work to determine the messages they contain if truly they undermine healthy eating habits.

### Objectives

The present study seeks to examine the themes of children food commercials that are aired on selected Nigerian TV stations and the types of appeals adopted with the aim of identifying whether they aid, in any way, the promotion of unhealthy food. Thus, in this research paper the researchers discussed the various

arguments both in favor and against advertising and the appeals that advertisers use to ensure audience persuasion. The researchers also examined selected cases of food adverts that had influence on children. Following from these, the researchers explained the method adopted in this study and the findings obtained from the analysis. The researchers finally made some recommendations based on the findings of the study.

Specifically, the study provided answers to the following research questions:

- ♦ What product types do children food advertisements present?
- ♦ What types of appeals are used in the advertisements?
- ♦ What are the dominant themes found in these ads?
- ♦ How are the themes and appeals used in the ads presented?

### Literature Review

The goal of advertising is to persuade people to make a purchase decision. Besides, several strategies are employed to ensure persuasion. One of such is psychodynamic persuasion strategy. The premise of psychodynamic persuasion strategy is that carefully employed information from a persuader can change the psychological orientation of an individual (Robinson 2011: 11). It states that for a message to be considered effective, it must have properties capable of altering the psychological functioning of individuals in such a way that they will respond overtly toward the item, that is, the object of persuasion with modes of behaviour desired or suggested by the communicator (Folarin 2005; DeFleur 1989: 278). In addition, effective persuasion takes place where the internal psychological structure of the individual is modified so that the psychodynamic relationship between latent internal process like motivation, attitude, etc. and manifest overt behaviour will lead to acts intended by the persuader. For instance, to encourage enlightened voting behaviour, the people must be made to develop favourable attitude to the electoral process. Certain psychological motivation used as intervening variables between the messages stimulus and audience responses include hunger, status drive, sexual urges, fear appeals etc. This model is relevant to this study because the

model deals with behaviour change (Anaeto et al. 2008). In essence, advertisers use themes and appeals that will alter the psychological functioning of the consumers in such a way that their desired behaviour will be achieved. The focus of psychodynamic theory was on the unconscious motivations that underpinned consumer choices, and the techniques were required to tap the unconscious collective and to manipulate not through persuasion and argument but through hidden persuasion (Lunt 2004).

### Two Sides of Advertising

Advertising is a form of communication intended to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to take some actions. It included the name of a product or service and how that product or service could benefit the consumer, to persuade potential customers to purchase or to consume that particular brand (Wright 2000). Modern advertising developed with the rise of mass production in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Commercial advertisers often seek to generate increased consumption of their products or services through branding, which involves the repetition of an image or product name in an effort to associate related qualities with the brand in the minds of consumers.

Several things have been said about the positive and negative aspects of advertising. No doubt, advertising supports the economic system; without it new products could not be introduced (Tubaorikli 2006: 2). Competitive advertising of new products and businesses empowers the engine of the economy, fostering economic growth and creating jobs in many industries. People also use advertising to gather information before making buying decisions. Besides, advertisement revenues make possible the “free” mass media we use not only for entertainment but for the maintenance of our democracy? Besides, by showing us the bounty of our capitalistic, free enterprise society, advertising increases national productivity (as people work harder to acquire more of these products) and improves the standard of living (as people actually acquire more of these products) (Belch and Belch 2001).

Further, advertising has also been criticised to be intrusive, deceptive, and, in the case of children’s advertising, inherently unethical.

Many critics fault advertising for its intrusiveness. Advertising is everywhere, and it interferes with and alters our experience. Giant wall advertisements change the look of cities. Advertisements beamed by laser light onto night skies destroy evening stargazing. Many internet users complain about the commercialization of the new medium and fear advertising will alter its free, open, and freewheeling nature (Baran 2006: 389).

Some critics say that much advertising is inherently deceptive in that it implicitly and sometimes explicitly promises to improve people's lives through the consumption or purchase of a sponsor's products. For instance, an advertisement shows a beautiful woman uses a certain brand of lipstick in the advertisement, and men follow her everywhere. Without making the argument explicit, the advertisement implies that if you use this product you will be beautiful, and if you are beautiful (or use this product), you will be more attractive to men. The advertising promises health, long life, sexual success, financial success, companionship, popularity and acceptance by using particular products. People understand, believe and accept these exaggerations, not as deception.

It has also been said that advertising exploits children. The average child sees thousands of television commercials and magazine advertisements every year; ads increasingly appear even on school materials (Consumers' Union 2002). The critics contend that children are simply not intellectually capable of interpreting the intent of these advertisements, nor are they able before the age of 7 or 8 to rationally judge the worth of the advertising claims. This makes children's advertising inherently unethical. Television advertising to kids is especially questionable because children consume it in the home with implicit parental approval, and most often without parental supervision. The question advertisement critics ask is, "if parents would never allow living sales people to enter their homes to sell their children products, why do they allow the most sophisticated salespeople of all to do it for 20 minutes every hour every Saturday morning?" (Baran 2006: 390).

Another criticism against advertising is that it demeans and corrupts culture. In our culture, consumers value beauty, kindness, prestige, family, love, and success. As human beings we need food, shelter, and sex. Advertising succeeds by appealing to these values and needs. The

basis for this persuasive strategy is *AIDA approach*- to persuade consumers, advertising must attract attention, create interest, stimulate desire, and promote action (Wijaya 2012; Strong Jr.1925). According to industry critics, however, problems arise when important aspects of human existence are reduced to the consumption of brand-name consumer products. Being a good mother is as simple as buying and using Maggi Seasoning to cook the family meal. Prestige is driving an exquisite car. Success is in using Miclean toothpaste. Love is giving your husband a shirt without ring-around the collar or your fiancée a diamond worth 2 months salary.

It is argued that advertising has turned us to become a consumer culture- a culture in which personal worth and identity reside not in ourselves but in the products with which we surround ourselves. In other words, advertising promotes materialism. Material objects are portrayed as desirable goals, leading to greed, envy and avarice (Domonick 2005: 361). The consumer culture is corrupting because it imposes new definitions that serve the advertiser and not the culture on traditionally important aspects of our lives. If love, for instance, can be bought rather than being something that has to be nurtured, how important can it be? If success is not something an individual values for the personal sense of accomplishment but rather is something chased for the material things associated with it, how does the culture evaluate success?

The critics contend that the consumer culture also demeans the individuals who live in it. A common advertising strategy for stimulating desire and suggesting action is to imply that we are inadequate and should not be satisfied with ourselves as we are. We are too fat or too thin, our hair is in need of improvement, clothes are all wrong, and our spouses do not respect us. Personal improvement is only a purchase away. Besides, people are made to purchase what they would not ordinarily want or what they do not need (Baran 2006; Domonick 2005).

In sum, Agee et al. (1994), cited in Wilson and Wilson (2001) identify six criticisms against advertising:

1. Advertising persuades us to buy goods and services that we cannot afford.
2. Advertising appeals primarily to our emotions, rather than to our intellect.
3. Advertising is biased
4. Advertising involves conflicting competitive claims

5. Advertising is unduly repetitious
6. Much advertising is vulgar, obtrusive, and irritating

### Advertising Appeals

Advertising appeals aim to influence the way consumers view themselves and also signifies how buying certain products can prove to be beneficial for them. The message conveyed through advertising appeals influences the purchasing decisions of consumers. The most important types of advertising appeals include emotional and rational appeals. Ambekar (2009) noted that emotional appeals are often effective for the youth, while rational appeals work well for products directed towards the older generation. Some of the appeals are discussed in the following sections.

An emotional appeal is related to an individual's psychological and social needs for purchasing certain products and services. Many consumers are emotionally motivated or driven to make certain purchases. Advertisers aim to cash-in on the emotional appeal and this works particularly well where there is no much difference between multiple product brands and its offerings. Emotional appeal usually includes personal and social aspects. Some personal emotions that can drive individuals to purchase products include safety, fear, love, humor, joy, happiness, sentiment, stimulation, pride, self esteem, pleasure, comfort, ambition, nostalgia etc. Social factors cause people to make purchases and include such aspects as recognition, respect, involvement, affiliation, rejection, acceptance, status and approval. Fear is also another important factor that can have incredible influence on individuals. Fear is often used to good effect in advertising and marketing campaigns of beauty and health products including insurance. Advertising experts indicate that using moderate levels of fear in advertising can prove to be effective.

Humor appeal is an excellent tool to catch the viewer's attention and help in achieving instant recall which can work well for the sale of the product. Humor can be used effectively when it is related to some benefit that the customer can derive without which the joke might overpower the message. Humor is an element that is used in around 30% of the advertisements (Ambekar 2009).

Further, there is sex appeal. Sex and nudity have always sold well. Sexuality, sexual suggestiveness, over sexuality or sensuality raises curiosity of the audience and can result in strong feelings about the advertisement. It could also result in the product appearing interesting. However, use of sex in some types of advertising appeals could have a boomerang effect if it is not used carefully. It could interfere with the actual message of the advertisement and purpose of the product and can also cause low brand recall. If this is used then it should be an integral part of the product and should not seem vulgar.

Besides, music is another kind of appeal. Music can be used as types of advertising appeals as it has a certain intrinsic value and can help in increasing the persuasiveness of the advertisement. It can also help capture attention and increase customers' recall. Scarcity appeal is based on limited supplies or limited time period for purchase of products and are often used while employing promotional tools including sweepstakes, contests, etc. Rational appeals as the name suggests aims to focus on the individual's functional, utilitarian or practical needs for particular products and services. Such appeals emphasize the characteristics and features of the product and the service and how it would be beneficial to own or use the particular brand. Print media is particularly well suited for rational appeals and is often used with good success. It is also suited for business to business advertisers and for products that are complex and that need high degree of attention and involvement.

Masculine-feminine appeal is used in cosmetic or beauty products and also clothing. This type of appeal aims at creating the impression of the perfect person. The message is that the product will infuse the perfection or the stated qualities in you. Brand appeal is directed towards people who are brand conscious and wish to choose particular products to make a brand statement. In addition, there is snob appeal which is directed towards creating feeling of desire or envy for products that are termed top of the line or that have considerable qualities of luxury, elegance associated with them. Adventure appeal is directed towards giving the impression that purchasing a product will change the individual's life radically and fill it with fun, adventure and action. Romance appeal displays the attraction between the sexes. The appeal is used to signify that buying certain products will have a

positive impact on the opposite sex and improve your romantic or love life. Frangrances, automobiles and other products use these types of advertising appeals (Nwankwo et al. 2013).

### Studies into Children's Food Advertisements

Igun (1982) provided an evidence of the use of status symbol as an appeal used to promote the sale of artificial milk. Two hundred and fifty (250) illiterate mothers of low-income families from Maiduguri (Nigeria) who attended ante-natal clinic in the city were studied. The study aimed to find out the emerging pattern of infant nutrition in Maiduguri and identify the factors behind it. It found a trend of combining traditional methods with methods that have been learnt through contact with the culture of industrialized countries. The two most important factors discovered through the study are (1) the media advertisements promoted the consumption of artificial milk and mothers in the elite groups who, showing a strong preference for the baby's bottle, thus elevate it to fashion status in the eyes of poor, (2) illiterate mothers with less western education, follow their example of the elite groups.

Hung et al. (1985) found similar situation existed in Hong Kong. Hung et al. (1985) examined the factors that influenced nutritional practices by studying 714 Chinese mothers of children aged between 4 weeks and 6 months. They observed that bottle feeding is more prevalent among mothers who are more influenced by professional medical people that are opposed to breast-feeding. Again, this influence is strongly reinforced by the media, particularly in television advertisements that support the introduction of this new practice as one that is healthy and that can be easily adapted to any situation. However, mothers who practise breast-feeding are influenced by their social networks who advise against using the baby's bottle.

Hill and Radimer (1997) confirm that food advertisements targeted at children usually promote consumption of unhealthy food. They assessed the types of foods, message content and portrayals of food eating situations in adverts in television programmes in Australia. They found out that predominant advertisement was for fast food restaurants (25%) and chocolate (22%). Core foods advertised were only cereal and fruit; while vegetables were rarely adver-

tised (1%), meat group was completely absent. They further noted that, the overall dietary picture portrayed to children was poorly balanced and included a narrow range of food. It was suggested that there should be definitive government legislation to control food advertising on children's television.

Harrison and Marske (2005) examined nutritional content, food type and eating occasion, as well as character attributes of food advertised during television programmes heavily viewed by children, and evaluated the nutritional content of advertised foods in terms of the nutrition facts label. The findings show that the 7 food type categories were not equally distributed across advertisements. Soft drinks, candy, sweets, and convenience/fast foods were advertised most frequently, followed distantly by breads and cereals. There was little representation of fruits and vegetables, dairy foods, meats, poultry, fish, and alcohol. Harrison and Marske (2005) observed a similar pattern of unequal distribution in the general audience sub-sample, but here the dominant category was convenience/fast foods. In the child-audience sub-sample, the most prevalent food category was candy/sweets/soft drinks. Most advertisements presented no health-related messages. Out of the few health-related messages in the sample, most common was the message that advertised foods contained some natural ingredients and that they were low in calories. For the entire sample, advertised foods were eaten mostly as snacks. This pattern was the same for the general audience and child-audience subsamples. In the child-audience advertisements, foods were consumed at snack time more frequently than at breakfast, lunch, and dinner combined. Because of the relatively high representation of food products in the breads/cereals category, breakfast was also fairly well represented in the child-audience sub-sample.

Batada et al. (2008) examined the types of foods, the nutritional quality of those foods, and the marketing techniques and messages used in food advertising during Saturday morning children's television programming in May 2005. The findings show that 49% of advertisements shown were for food. Then, the most common advertised food groups were ready-to-eat breakfast cereal and cereal bars (27% of all food advertisements), restaurants (19% of food advertisements), and snack foods (18% of food ad-

vertisements). A significant revelation from the findings was that ninety-one per cent (91%) of food advertisements were for foods or beverages high in fat, sodium, or added sugars or were low in nutrients. Cartoon characters were used in 74% of food advertisements, and toy or other giveaways were used in 26% of food advertisements. Further, about half of food advertisements contained health/nutrition or physical activity messages and 86% of food advertisements contained emotional appeals.

Chang's (2013) study on the assessment of advertised and availability of unhealthy food in China shows a connection between unhealthy food and advertising. The findings showed that fast food franchise outlets were the most advertised whereas a large proportion of beverages were provided at convenience store. The percentage of television commercial promotion of unhealthy foods was 71% as compared to the incidence of unhealthy food/drink availability accounted for 82.2% at convenience store. The result evidenced that TV food environment and retail status both being contributing to the increased risk for obesity. Advertising is often blamed for damaging public health by encouraging the consumption of unhealthy food. It was observed in the study that Chinese food and drink commercials and in-store advertisements aimed at young consumers often adopted interactive agents and promises of free gifts or coupons as rewards for buying a product. Marketing easily captures the minds of many young consumers; because children's preferences are not yet well-developed, food and drink advertisements and promotions on television and at retail stores exert an influence on their dietary habits in a number of ways.

#### METHOD OF STUDY

The present study made use of qualitative content analysis method to examine the messages contained in some selected samples of children food advertisements screened in Nigerian television stations. Qualitative analysis of texts is necessary to understand their deeper meanings and likely interpretations by audiences, which is the ultimate goal of analysing media content (Macnamara 2005: 5). The present study examined the appeals and themes most evident in a sample of food advertisements targeting children. The ads selected are those that were

on air for over six months in 2012. The selected ads were aired on African Independent Television (AIT), Silverbird Television (STV), National Television Authority (NTA Channels 5 and 10), Lagos Television (LTV), Channels Television and Television Continental (TVC) all located in Lagos State, Nigeria. The researchers visited three of these stations to collect the video clips of the adverts, having observed that these adverts are all screened on the afore mentioned TV stations. Instead of monitoring the adverts on TV stations, the opportunity to have the video clips of the adverts made the analysis of the ads easier. The advertisements were selected because they are children food ads, made use of children and were also targeted at children. They included advertisements on Indomie Noodles, Milo, Blue Band Margarine, Chi exotic flavour, Chivita orange juice, Hollandia cream, Holladia custard powder, Cowbell chocolate drink and Cowbell Vitarich. The unit of analysis consisted of individual advert and were analysed for type of product advertised, appeals used, the themes of the adverts and the mode of presentation.

#### RESULTS

The adverts analysed were on four product categories. Chi exotic and chivita orange are juice drinks. Four of the products- Cowbell choco milk, Vitarich, Hollandia milk and Milo are beverages. The other two categories are Cereal (Hollandia custard and Indomie noodles) and Margarine (Blue band).



Fig. 1. Types of product advertised

### Advertising Appeals

Five types of appeals were found in the advertisements. They are celebrity, music, adventure, rational and band wagon appeals. Five of the products adopted celebrity appeal in their adverts. *Chi exotic* flavour used Sunny Nneji, a musician; *Chivita* used a Nollywood star- Jide Kosoko; *Hollandia* milk featured Bukky Wright, another Nollywood star; *Hollandia* custard used Nkiru Sylvanus, also an another Nollywood star, while *Milo* featured a football star, Kanu Nwankwo. Music was used in a number of the adverts. *Chi exotic* flavour and *Chivita* used music and the characters in the adverts danced to it. The same goes for *Hollandia* custard. Adventure appeal was used in only Cowbell choco milk advert. It is a presentation of a boy on a flying bicycle.

Rational appeal was used in VitaRich, emphasizing the utilitarian value of the beverage as supplying vitamins A, C, E and K. *Hollandia* milk focused on the functionality of the new pack of the product which as claimed keeps the product free of germs. Indomie noodles advert claimed to supply a number of vitamins which make for healthy growth of children. Blue band margarine stressed that the product was useful for children's healthy growth. Bandwagon appeal is found in *Hollandia* custard as different categories of people were presented as enjoying the product. The same goes for *chi exotic* flavour and *chivita* orange juice.

### Thematic Analysis

Five major themes were identified in the advertisements. They included accomplishment and improved performance, exaggerated health claims, happiness and fun, increased popularity and disparagement of core food.

#### Accomplishment and Improved Performance

The Nestle Milo drink and Cowbell chocolate drink underscored the themes of accomplishment and improved performance. Milo says it is the food drink of future champions. The insinuation is that the consumption of Milo makes a future champion. It follows then that for any child to be a champion in future, he or she must consume Milo. Of course, this is not correct because mere consumption of food does not make a champion. The Milo advert used a football star (Kanu Nwankwo) who has won a lot of

awards for his brilliant accomplishment to foreground its theme of accomplishment.

Similarly, Cowbell choco drink portrayed accomplishment and the improved performance by showing a boy who rode on a flying bicycle. The boy after drinking a cup of cowbell choco began to ride and then the bicycle began to fly. The drink, as it were "*keeps you going*" as the boy flew across nations of the earth- from Nigeria to China, Paris, Egypt and New York. The choco drink is said to supply strength, vigour and energy. Thus, the flying ability of the boy on the bicycle was as a result of the drink.

#### Exaggerated Health Claims

Another theme generated from the adverts is exaggerated health claims. This is found in Blue Band Margarine. It is claimed by the adverts that the product helps the growth of children. A boy measured his height and rushed to eat blue band margarine so that he could grow up. The radio version of the advert is slightly different. A boy in the advertisement intended to carry blueband margarine to school for his friend who was shorter than him. This is because he wanted his best friend to grow up and have the same height with him. The boy got approval from his mother to carry the product. The question is: does mere eating of margarine makes one to grow in height? Another product in this category is the Indomie noodles advert which claims to provide vitamins for healthy growth, bright eyes and strong bones for the consumers especially the children. The ad claimed to enrich consumers' health with the supply of the said vitamins.

#### Increased Popularity

Celebrity appeal is also a common theme in children food advert. *Chivita* drink advert used a celebrity- a popular Yoruba film actor- Jide Kosoko. *Hollandia* evaporated milk used Bukky Wright, also an actress, in its advert. In the case of *chivita*, children surrounded the actor and were singing. Both Jide Kosoko and Bukky Wright, popular Nollywood stars were used to enhance the popularity of the products.

#### Happiness and Fun

Another theme seen in the advert is happiness and fun. *Hollandia* Custard Powder advert used this theme. It focused on a celebrity-Nkiru

Sylvanus with children rejoicing and dancing, expressing their love for Hollandia Custard. Thus, the product is associated with happiness and fun. The implication of this is that children would be impressed upon with such association and each time they want to seek fun or show happiness, they would think of Hollandia Custard Powder.

### Subtle Derogation of Core Food

The researchers also observed that the adverts generally do not relate in anyway with core foods as the products advertised are said to supply the essentials that core foods supply. Blue band margarine advertisements claimed it helps the growth of children without any recourse to addition of core food as necessary for human growth. Indomie claims to supply vitamin without any reference to core food as important. Chivita claimed to provide strength for achievement as if that is all what is needed to be an achiever. Generally, the advertised foods were portrayed as all-important for what they claim but it is very obvious that those claims cannot be achieved without core foods that the body requires.

### Mode of Presentations

The presentations adopted for the appeals and themes found in the advertisements make for excitements and persuasion. The two chi products presented a mood of happiness and celebration-children gathering around the celebrities that were used singing and dancing to music. Chi exotic flavour emphasized the refrain "*life comes alive*", while chivita uses "*I love chivita*."

Cowbell choco milk depicted a boy who received energy to ride on flying bicycle having taken a cup of the drink. The boy rode and flew from National theatre, Lagos all through Great Wall of China, the Eiffel Tower, Paris, the Sphinx in Egypt, the Statue of Liberty, New York and back to Zuma Rock in Abuja, Nigeria. The refrain in the advert- '*Cowbell choco milk gets you going*' was well emphasized.

The two Hollandia products-milk and custard-use celebrities. The first introduced the new milk pack and stressed its functionality. The second depicted the celebrity with children in joyful mood enjoying the custard, many others joined the ongoing dance. VitaRich showed a

mother teaching her kind how to pronounce the name of the product and went ahead to talk about the value of the product. The Milo advert presented a boy who was proud of his father for having won so many awards. The father- a football star, Kanu Nwakwo attributed his success to determination which comes through consumption of the beverage. For Blue band margarine, a boy measured his height and rushed to eat the product to hasten his growth.

### DISCUSSION

The product types that children foods ads presented share similarity with global trends of children advertising. Harrison and Marske (2005) noted that 80% of foods advertised on television for children are convenience/ fast foods and sweets. The researchers found this to be correct in the present study. Chi exotic and Chivita orange are sweet juice drinks that children would like. Indomie noodles, Hollandia custards and Blueband, as well as Hollandia and Milo are fast food for children to take. Unfortunately, over 95% of these products are unhealthy because they are high in saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and sodium (Daniells 2013). Similarly, appeals used as instruments of persuasion are not different from those that advertisers usually use for children and other audiences. Emotional appeals- celebrity, music, adventure, rational and bandwagon, which are often effective for youth and children (Ambekar 2009), form the bulk of the appeals found in the ads analyzed. It appears that the advertisers have already known what works and what does not; hence, these are appropriately applied when ads messages for children are being developed.

The themes surfacing in the ad messages revealed what the advertisers based their persuasion on. Words like *champion*, *keeps you going*, etc. were used to connect drinks with accomplishment and improved performance. But one knows clearly that mere consumption of a drink does not lead to accomplishment in any life's endeavor. This is one of the reasons why advertising has been criticised for being deceptive. The themes also showed that the claims made on some of the products are exaggerated. As earlier pointed out, claiming that by eating margarine, a child will grow taller is not only untrue, but also undermines the necessary core foods for growth and the role of genetic factor



in physical growth. In addition, music and dance were used to present a mood of happiness with a product; thus establishing a connection between the product and celebration, happiness and fun. This implies that when children want celebration and happiness, the products quickly come to mind to fulfill that purpose. Unfortunately, the ads messages generally, in a very subtle way, derogate core food. By claiming to contain the essentials that core foods supply, they are invariably presenting core foods as unnecessary and directing the audience's attention away from them.

### CONCLUSION

The researchers have examined the advertising appeals and themes found in children food commercials on Nigerian television stations. The themes vary from improved performance to exaggerated health claims, celebrity appeals, happiness and fun and subtle disparagement of core foods. These elements are capable of influencing children's food socialization. The findings seem to support the criticism that advertising can be deceptive in that it implicitly and sometimes explicitly promises to improve people's lives through the consumption or purchase of a sponsor's products. As observed in those advertisements, continuous exposure to them can alter our experience of appropriate food consumption. This situation would even be worse for children who are not intellectually capable of interpreting the intent of these ads, nor are they able before the age of 7 or 8 to rationally judge the worth of the advertising claims. When our experience of appropriate food consumption is altered by the adverts that we are exposed to, it consequently changes our culture of food consumption. Already, there are many homes that have been affected by this trend. Some children prefer indomie noodles to core food; while fruit juice has replaced natural fruits in many homes. This is because the adverts of these products have succeeded in changing people's orientation about food consumption and endeared themselves as appropriate to meet their needs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

There is, therefore, the need for responsible food advertising to children. Regulatory agencies like the Advertising Practitioners Council of

Nigeria (APCON) need to put into consideration the possibilities of some checks that could compel advertisers to be more truthful and enlightening when they package children food adverts. One of such checks might be to compel the advertisers to include a caveat that will emphasize the importance of core food to children's growth into their advert content. This will go a long way to protect the interest of children as they are daily bombarded by different advertisers striving to get their attention and commitment.

While the Nigerian Advertising Code of Practice forbids deception in advertisements, there is still the need to have specific provision to take care of children. Children could be gullible and incapable of discerning between what right or bad for them in terms of food consumption due to their limited knowledge. They, therefore, need special protection against advertisements that may mislead them. There is need for expression of plain truth to prevent children from imbibing the culture of junk food whose adverts are always very persuasive.

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