International Research on Advertising and Children

by

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Chapter summary

This chapter will discuss the importance of studying advertising to children from an international perspective and the major trends of such research. We shall examine the research on advertising and children in China as a case study to illustrate what types of research studies have been conducted, the major findings, and the theoretical contribution to the research literature. China was selected because of two reasons. First, China has the world’s largest population of children. The One-child per family policy has empowered Chinese children with tremendous influence on family purchase decisions. Second, China’s growing consumer economy makes it a very important new market for international advertisers who aim at children and youth. Concerns about advertising to children, such as the growth of materialism in a traditionally socially oriented society and the role of regulation in a new and expanding market will be examined. We shall identify recent trends in international research on advertising and children. Readers will be equipped with the knowledge to carry out similar studies in other countries, and hence expand the horizon of our knowledge on children and international advertising.
Importance of research on advertising and children from an international perspective

Advertisers target children because children are three markets in one (McNeal, 1992). Children are a primary market as they have money of their own, needs and wants, and willingness to spend the money on the needs and wants. Children are an influence market as they directly influence household purchases when they make requests for certain goods and services, telling the parents about a certain brand, or making the selection when co-shopping with the family. Children also indirectly influence household purchases when parents or household shopping decision makers consider children’s preference when making purchase decisions. Children are a future market as they become the consumers of all products and services as they grow older. Companies invest in the children market in order to establish long-term relationship with them (McNeal, 1992).

Advertising to children remains a controversial topic (Preston, 2004). Arguments for and against children’s advertising should be an informed decision by policy makers that based on solid research foundation. As a result, there is a need for research on advertising and children.

In the year 2010, 27 percent of the world’s population is aged under 15 (Population Reference Bureau, 2011). Asia is projected to overtake all other regions in total number of children, with over half the children population worldwide (Batada, 2011). The relatively recent and rapid proliferation of television, mobile devices,
video games, Internet, and other media across Asia, and particularly among children and youth, raises many questions about the influence of the commercial messages in these media on young consumers’ lives. Despite interest in these and other related questions, the published research on Asian children and media is still limited to a small proportion of journal articles. Currently, research and theoretical perspectives on children and media are predominantly set in North America and Europe, though there are increasing examples from other regions of the world (Batada, 2011). This book chapter attempts to review recent research conducted with and about Asian children and advertising, in order to begin to establish a body of research, practice, and literature focused on this region.

The following section summarizes the results of our research effort on advertising and children in China. It serves as a case study to illustrate what has been done on this research topic in a country with the largest numbers of children in the world.

[B] Background information about China

China, the country with the largest population of children in the world, adopted a One-child per family policy in 1979 and it is the current rule in urban China (Zhang & Yang, 1992). These only children have a substantial amount of their own money to spend and exert a great influence on their household spending (McNeal & Yeh, 1997). In the year 2010, there were 241 million children under age 15 in China with approximately forty-seven percent urban, fifty-three percent rural (Population
Urban population increased from 31 percent of the total in 1995 to 47 percent in 2010 (Population Reference Bureau, 2011; United Nations, 2005), reflecting a rapid rate of urbanization. The social and economic reforms are leading to a rapid increase in household incomes and demand for products and services (Batra, 1997). While rapid commercialization of childhood as a result of economic restructuring, new affluence, and innovative retailing practices is not unique to China, its One-child per family policy and the rapid economic development have enabled the process to unfold at a fast pace and across all social strata (Davis & Sensenbrenner, 2000).

[C] Theoretical framework

The process of learning to be consumers is called consumer socialization (Ward, 1974). Theory says that children learn consumer behavior patterns from various socializing agents, including parents, peers, schools, stores, media, and the products themselves and their packages (Moschis, 1987). Media’s influence on children is mainly due to two dimensions—advertising and editorial/programming content (O’Guinn & Shrum, 1997). Advertising specifically intends to inform these young consumers about products and encourage behaviors such as checking the products at the stores, memorizing the brand names, asking parents for the products, or buying the products with their own money. Both advertising and editorial/program content of the mass media have the potential to provide children with knowledge and guidance in
their consumer behavior development. However, it is often difficult to separate their influence.

John (1999) proposes a model of consumer socialization that describes children’s knowledge about advertising, brands, and shopping as well as purchase decision making skills and strategies. Our review here is mainly based on the parts on children’s advertising knowledge as well as the consumption motives. In the model, learning to be a consumer is a developmental process from the perceptual stage (3-7 years) to the analytical stage (7-11 years) to the reflective stage (11-16 years). In the perceptual stage, children can grasp concrete knowledge only. Their consumer knowledge is characterized by perceptual features and distinctions based on a single and simple dimension. They are egocentric and generally unable to take others’ perspectives into account. Children in the analytical stage are able to grasp abstract knowledge. Concepts are thought of in terms of functional or underlying dimensions. They are able to analyze marketplace information in two or more dimensions and have the acknowledgment of contingencies. They have developed new perspectives that go beyond their own feelings and motives, and can assume dual perspectives of their own and that of others. Children in the reflective stage possess a multi-dimensional understanding of concepts such as brands. They shift into more reflective ways of thinking and reasoning and focus more on the social meanings and underpinnings of the consumer marketplace.
In 2001, we were awarded with a research grant from the University Grant Council of the Hong Kong SAR Government to investigate on the interplay of television advertising and children in China. We focused on television advertising, because of its mass media coverage among children, as well as its audio and visual impacts. In order to have some ideas about what Chinese children were watching on television, we commissioned a market research company to videotape a week of children’s programs on the national CCTV children’s channel, as well as three regional television channels, including Beijing, Nanjing, and Chengdu. The three regional cities were chosen to represent high, medium, and low level of advertising development, based on the per capita provincial advertising expenditure published in the official statistics. We observed that there were great differences in the types of children’s programs, the amount of advertising, and the types of advertising in our sample of children’s programs. For example, the CCTV and the Beijing TV broadcasted a variety of children’s programs including games, science documentary, variety shows, and cartoons. Chengdu, on the other hand, was quite backward, in terms of children’s programs. Puppet shows of Chinese operas were telecasted in Chengdu children’s television hours! Another observation was that public service advertisements were found only in the national as well as the Beijing television channels, but not in the Nanjing and Chengdu television. Consistent with what we
expect, cities with high per capita advertising expenditure showed more advertisements than cities with low per capita advertising expenditure. Both CCTV and Beijing TV carried about 15 minutes of advertisements in a typical schedule of children’s after-school programming that last about two to three hours. The Chengdu television channels carried only one to two minutes of advertisements in a typical schedule of children’s after-school programming that last about one to two hours. Also, in the one-week sample, the same advertisers occurred at the commercial breaks of the Chengdu children’s programs, at exactly the same sequence. One observation was that children’s television programs carried advertisements of products that target both children and the adults. Over 70 percent of the commercials in children’s programming hours were commercials for adults’ products while less than 30 percent were commercials for children’s products (Chan & McNeal, 2004). The children’s TV programs were found to be overwhelmingly educational, instilling hardcore knowledge in even programs for young children aged 5 to 8. Competition among teams was encouraged and we also found a mean television host who belittled children in the game shows (Chan & Chan, 2008).

With the background information of what the Chinese children were watching, we conducted a qualitative study of children’s responses to television advertising and parental concern of television advertising to children. Three focus group interviews of 22 urban Chinese children ages 6 to 12 were conducted in Beijing in October 2001.
The findings yielded similarities with a previous study of Chinese children in Hong Kong (Chan, 2000). Mainland Chinese children’s were similar to Hong Kong Chinese in their increased understanding and decreased trust of television advertising with age. Interviewees reported that entertainment value was the main reason for liking or disliking of television advertisements. Chinese children enjoyed commercials that were funny and disliked commercials that were boring and repetitive. Interviewees showed a high awareness of public services advertising. Several public service advertisements on protecting the environment were brought up by the interviewees. Interviewees held negative attitudes toward television commercials of health products and medicines. They found them exaggerating or even lying to them. Older interviewees had some negative perceptions of advertised brands. They did not agree that they could put more trust on advertised brands. Interviewees got very excited about the discussion of their most favorite and disliked television commercials. Some interviewees even recited the script or acted out an entire commercial (Chan & McNeal, 2002). One focus group of parents was conducted in Beijing on the same day with the focus group study of children. Parents in general showed appreciation of the creativity of some advertisements. However, they criticized television commercials for creating family tensions when children pestered for certain foods or toys. They were concerned about advertisers using premiums to induce purchase among children. Interviewees were concerned about commercials containing offensive scenes,
disrespect of seniors, and scenes suggestive of sexual contents. For example, parents felt embarrassed when children asked them about advertisements of the sex remedy pharmaceutical products. Some parents found advertisements for lingerie too sexual. They showed dislike of advertising slogans that changed words in Chinese proverbs as it created a confusing linguistic environment for young children (Chan, 2002).

As television is the major media to reach young consumers in China, the research focus is on television advertising and children. Based on the exploratory study on children and parents using qualitative enquiries, we designed a large-scale quantitative study on urban children and their parents. Two sets of structured questionnaires were designed, with one set for elementary school children, and one set for their parents. We identified research partners at Beijing, Nanjing, and Chengdu, to get cooperation from school administrators to conduct the study during normal class sessions. Two elementary schools were recruited in each of the three selected cities. One class each from grade 1 to grade 6 was randomly selected from the sampled schools to form the child respondent sample. Children in grades 3 to 6 were instructed to complete the questionnaire on their own in the classroom. For children in grades 1 and 2, the researchers read out the questions as well as the answers, and ask the children to check the most appropriate answers. Students were assured that feedback was anonymous and there were no right or wrong answers in each question. Altogether, 1758 questionnaires were collected from the children (460 from Beijing, 557 from
Nanjing, and 741 from Chengdu). Several questionnaires were not usable because most of the questions were left blank or checked with two or more answers, leaving a net total of 1744 usable questionnaires. The response rate was 99.2 percent. All the responding children were in the age group of 6 to 14. The sampled children were instructed to take a set of questionnaire home to their parents for completion.

Questionnaires were then returned to the schools. Altogether, 1758 questionnaires were distributed and 1665 questionnaires were collected (423 from Beijing, 518 from Nanjing, and 724 from Chengdu). The response rate was 94.7 percent. As part of the family planning policy in China is to encourage late marriage and late bearing of children, a majority of the sampled parents with children in elementary schools fell within the age group of 30 to 39 (Chan & McNeal, 2004).

Because of the large sample size, all of the questions were closed-ended. The questionnaires were constructed based on a previous study of children and advertising in Hong Kong (Chan, 2000), the results of the qualitative study of children and television advertising reported in the previous section (Chan & McNeal, 2002), and the research literature.

The questionnaire for the children contains questions for the following topics that are related to children’s responses to advertising:

- Understanding of television advertising
- Attitudes toward television advertising: Perceived truthfulness and liking of
television advertisements

- Basis of determining which commercials are true and which are not true
- Responses to four different advertising approaches
- Responses toward their favorite and most disliked television commercials
- Perception of advertised and non-advertised brands

John (1999)’s model of consumer socialization was adopted as the theoretical framework. As a result, results will be analyzed by three age groups of 6-7, 8-11, and 12-14.

[D1] Understanding of television advertising

Understanding of television advertising was measured by a verbal method. Children were told: When we watch television, some messages occur before or after the television program that are not related to the program. They are called commercials (Guangguo). Children were then asked, “What are TV commercials?”, “What do TV commercials want you to do?”, and “Why do TV stations broadcast commercials?” For each question, five to six answers were presented. The children were asked to check one answer that they thought was the most appropriate. Among all the answers presented in the first question, only one indicated participants’ awareness of the persuasive intent of television advertising (i.e. television commercials are messages “to promote products”). For the second question, two of the five answers indicated participants’ awareness of the persuasive intent of television advertising (i.e. television
commercials want us “to tell our parents about it” and “to buy the products”). For the third question, two of the six answers indicated participants’ awareness of the profit intent and the notion of program sponsorship (i.e. television stations broadcast commercials in order “to make money” and “to subsidize the production of programs”). These answers were classified as “demonstration of understanding” of television advertising. All other answers were classified as “not demonstration of understanding” of television advertising.

For the first question “What are TV commercials?”, 34 percent of the sample demonstrated the persuasive intent of television advertising by giving the “correct” answer. Altogether 28 percent perceived that TV commercials are messages for the audience to take a break, while 11 percent perceived that TV commercials are funny messages. About 25 percent perceived that TV commercials are message for introducing products and two percent report “don’t know”. Respondents show a general increase in understanding of “what are TV commercials” with age.

For the second question “What do TV commercials wants you to do?”, 66 percent of the sample demonstrated the persuasive intent of television advertising by giving the “correct” answers. Among the sample, 21 percent perceived that commercials want them to check the products at stores, while 9 percent perceived that commercials want them to evaluate if the ads are good or bad. Four percent report “don’t know”.
Respondents show a general increase in understanding of “what do TV commercials want you to do” with age.

For the third question “Why do television stations broadcast commercials?”, 54 percent of the sample demonstrated the persuasive intent of television advertising by giving the “correct” answers. Among the sample, 17 percent perceived that television stations broadcast commercials in order to care for the public. About 14 percent perceived that television stations broadcast commercials as not to waste time, while 11 percent perceived that television stations broadcast commercials in order to help the audience. Four percent report “don’t know”. Respondents did not show a general increase in understanding of “why do television stations broadcast commercials” with age.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the understanding scale was 0.37. The item-item correlation was the lowest between the second item “what do TV commercials want you to do” and the third item “why do television stations broadcast commercials”. It suggests that even if a child knows that television stations carry commercials to make money and to sponsor program, it does not mean the child understands the persuasive intent of advertising.

[D2] Attitudes toward television advertising

Attitudes toward television advertising are measured by two dimensions, including perceived truthfulness of television advertising, and liking of television advertising.
Perceived truthfulness of television advertising was measured by asking respondents whether television advertising is true. Respondents could choose from one of the five answers, including “nearly all of them are true”, “mostly are true”, “half of them are true”, “mostly are not true”, or “nearly all of them are not true”. Respondents could also check the answer “don’t know”. Liking of television commercials was measured by asking respondents whether they liked or dislike television advertising. Respondents could choose from one of the five answers, including “like very much”, “like”, “neutral”, “dislike”, or “dislike very much”. Respondents could also check the answer “don’t know”.

Regarding respondents’ perceptions of the truthfulness of television commercials, a major portion of the respondents (41 percent) perceived that half of television commercials are true. About 15 percent and 24 percent thought that ‘nearly all’ or ‘most of’ the commercials were true, respectively. On the negative side, nine percent believed that ‘nearly all commercials are not true’ and 12 percent thought that ‘most of the commercials are not true’. Altogether 249 respondents reported that they don’t know and they were treated as missing values.

Pearson correlation coefficients between perceived truthfulness of television advertising and age was -0.01(p>0.05). With increasing age, there was a decreasing percentage of respondents who perceived that nearly all television advertising are true as well as nearly all television advertising are not true. With increasing age, there
were an increasing percentage of respondents who perceived that half of the television advertising are true.

Regarding liking of television commercials, over one-quarter of the respondents (26 percent) reported neutral feelings toward television commercials. Twenty-nine of the sample reported that they like television commercials and 17 percent reported that they like television commercials very much. Seventeen percent claimed that they dislike television commercials and 12 percent reported that they dislike television commercials very much.

Pearson correlation coefficient between liking of television advertising and age was -0.03 (p>0.05). With increasing age, both the percentage of respondents who liked advertising and the percentage of respondents who disliked advertising dropped. However, the percentage of respondents who expressed neutral feeling toward television advertising increased with age. As a result of the curvilinear relationship, there was no age difference in liking of television advertising among respondents.

[D3] Basis of judging truthful or untruthful advertisements

Basis of judging the truthfulness of television advertising was measured by asking respondents how they determined which commercials were true and which were not true. Respondents could choose from one of the five answers, including “try the products”, “if they are about a trustworthy”, “check the products at stores”, “ask parents”, “ask teachers”, “whether the commercials seem so” or “if it is endorsed by
From the survey findings, children most often decided which commercials are true and which are not by trying the products (27 percent) or seeing if the products are from trustworthy brands or advertisers (25 percent). About 18 percent of the children reported that they would check the products at the stores and 16 percent would ask their parents or teachers. Nearly ten percent of children relied on their intuitive feelings. Four percent would see if some trustworthy persons endorsed the products.

The bases for judging truthfulness of commercials did not differ by level of TV viewing, but differed by age among all three cities. The youngest children mainly depended on authorities to help the differentiation. As younger children typically cannot read, they simply cannot learn much about products from newspapers, magazines, and catalogues. Younger children thus learn to detect bias in television commercials mainly from their parents. Older children relied much less on authority. Older children were more likely to use personal experience and trust in the brand/advertiser as bases for judgment.

[D4] Responses to four different advertising approaches

Questions were asked to what degree children liked different advertising approaches. Four different advertising approaches were studied, including funny commercials, animated commercials, public service announcements, and commercials using celebrities. Children were asked whether they disliked (coded as
1), neither liked nor disliked (coded as 2), or liked these commercials (coded as 3).

‘Don’t know’ cases were treated as missing cases.

Overall, children expressed liking for three out of four advertising approaches. They tend to have neutral feeling toward commercials with celebrities. Respondents liked funny ads the most, followed by animated ads, then public service announcements, then celebrity advertisements. Among four selected advertising approaches, celebrity ads were the least favorite type.

Liking of funny advertisements did not show any difference in age. Respondents of different age groups responded to funny television commercials to similar degree. The other three advertising approaches demonstrated significant differences in age. Younger children liked animated ads more than older children. Younger children liked celebrity ads more than older children. Older children liked public services ads more than younger children.

Children of all age group liked funny. This is consistent with previous findings that entertainment value is the most frequently reported reason for liking of television commercials by children in Hong Kong (Chan, 2000). The finding suggests that age-specific advertising strategies should be adopted to communicate to children. Advertisements for younger children should use visually stimulating animated characters. Older children enjoyed public service advertisements. Advertisements should be meaningful by showing how the product or the service cares about society
or the environment, and use less animation.

[D5] Responses toward their favorite and most disliked television commercials

We ask children to check one or more responses for their favorite television commercials, including want to see the commercial again have a good impression about the brand, want to buy the product right away, and feel that could be me. Similarly, we ask children to check one or more responses for their most disliked television commercials, including don’t want to see the commercial again, have a bad impression about the brand, don’t want to buy the product, and feel that couldn’t be me.

Among the sample, 58 percent of children reported that their favorite commercials made them want to see the commercials again. Forty-eight percent of respondents reported that they develop a good impression about the brand. Thirty-six percent wanted to buy the product right away and 29 percent projected themselves into their favorite commercials.

Similarly, 71 percent of children reported that their most disliked commercials made them don’t want to see the commercials again. Forty-four percent of respondents reported that they develop a bad impression about the brand. Thirty-three percent did not want to buy the product and 27 percent projected themselves into their most disliked commercials and felt that couldn’t be me.
Older children were less eager to see their favorite commercials again. With increase in age, children were less likely to associate attitudes toward the commercials with immediate purchase intention. Increase in age, however, was related with a stronger link between attitudes towards the commercials and attitudes towards the brands.

The above findings are summarized in Table 1 that describes a model of Chinese children’s responses to advertising at different age group.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[E] Parental concerns about advertising to children

Chinese parents are concerned about commercials containing offensive scenes, violence, and scenes suggestive of pornography, such as commercials for bras and breast builders (Wiseman, 1999; Wang, 2000). Others are concerned about the misleading contents and materialistic values in television commercials (Ma, 2000). Traditional Chinese culture puts much emphasis on thrift and frugality, and spends within your means. Chinese parents worry that advertising encourages children to buy luxurious goods or unnecessary possessions. We conducted a survey of the parents by asking the respondents participated in the advertising and children study described in the previous section to bring back a questionnaire to their parents. Altogether, 1,665 valid questionnaires were collected. All of them were parents of elementary school
children aged six to fourteen in Beijing, Nanjing and Chengdu. Results found that respondents hold negative attitudes toward television advertising in general and children’s advertising specifically. Respondents perceived that advertising in China is deceptive and annoying. Parents feel strongly that advertising should be banned on children’s programming. Chinese parents worried that advertisements for food and snack products encourage unhealthy eating. Fifty-three percent of respondents perceived that there is too much sugar in the foods advertised to children and forty-four percent of respondents reported that advertising teaches children bad eating habits. Nearly fifty percent of respondents commented that advertisers use marketing gimmicks to encourage children to buy the products. Thirty-seven percent reported that advertising directed at children leads to family conflicts. Ninety-eight percent of parents exercise some control over the contents and time of television viewing. Chinese parents seldom watched television with children and they seldom discussed television commercials with them. Despite of the minimal family communication on television advertising, Chinese parents perceived optimistically that they have great influence on their children’s attitudes toward advertising (Chan & McNeal, 2004).

[F] Undesirable effects of advertising on children

One of the concerns about advertising to children is the undesirable influence of advertising on children’s preference for material goods as a means of achieving success, happiness, and self-fulfillment (Chan, 2003). The concept is sometimes
termed “materialism” (Richin & Dawson, 1990). Materialism has been treated as a negative value as it is connected to envy, lack of generosity, greed and jealousy (Belk, 1983).

We used a materialism scale for children developed by a group of psychology students (Heerey et al., 2002). It consisted of 14 items that prompt whether children want more money and toys, whether they often compare their possessions to their friends, and whether they associate social significance to ownership of special toys (Chan, 2003). On a five-point scale, the materialism score for a sample of 246 Chinese children aged 6 to 13 in Hong Kong was 3.1. The statements that respondents most agreed with were “It’s better to have more allowance”, “I want to have things that other kids like”, “I like celebrating my birthday because I can get a lot of presents”, and “I like to own the newest things”. The statements that respondents least agreed with were “I would be upset if my best friend had the toy I most wanted”, and “My friends like me because I have cool toys”. The findings indicated that Hong Kong children expressed a desire to possess money to buy cool and fancy stuff. However, they did not perceive a strong link between possessions and friends. The scale achieved a high level of scale reliability with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80.

Respondents of the age group 6-7 were found most materialistic. Respondents in the age groups 8-11 as well as 12-13 showed no statistical difference in their materialism score. Regression analysis found that materialism score had no correlation.
with sex, household size, and co-viewing of television with parents. However, respondents watching more television as well as respondents with more weekly allowance were found more materialistic. Also, respondents acknowledging manipulative and informative functions of advertising, respondents who put more trust in ads, and respondents who like ads more were found more materialistic (Chan, 2003).

We repeated the study on a sample of 256 Beijing children aged 6 to 13. One item in Heerey et al.’s (2002) scale (i.e. “I like to compare myself with my friends to see who got more toys”) was modified to “I like to compare myself with my friends to see who got the most unique stuff”. Another item “I like to own things because they make me feel good about myself” was added. On a five-point scale, the materialism score for the sample was 2.4. It was significantly lowered that that among Hong Kong children. The statements that respondents most agreed with were “It would not make me happier if I owned nicer things (reversed coded), “More allowance would not make me happier (reversed coded), and “It’s better to have more allowance”. The statements that respondents least agreed with were “I like to compare myself with my friends to see who got the most unique stuff”, and “I like my friends because they own a lot of good stuff”. The findings indicated that Beijing children expressed a desire to have more allowance and nice things. However, they did not perceive a strong link between possessions and friendship. They engaged in a low level of social comparison of
possessions with friends. The scale achieved a high level of scale reliability with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82.

Again, respondents of the age group 6-7 were found most materialistic. Respondents in the age groups 8-11 as well as 12-13 showed no statistical difference in their materialism score. Regression analysis found that materialism score had no correlation with sex, or whether the respondent was a single-child. However, respondents’ exposure to the internet was found to have positive correlation with materialism score. Exposure to all other media including television, radio, print, videogames etc were found to have no relation with materialism score (Chan, 2005).

The low materialism value endorsed by children in Mainland China triggers our curiosity about the socialization of consumption values in China. We conducted two studies, each using a different research methodology. First, 15 children in Beijing aged 6-12 were asked to draw what comes to their minds for two statements: “This child has a lot of new and expansive toys”; and “This child does not have a lot of toys”. After drawing, children were interviewed face-to-face to answer questions associating material possessions with social meaning and symbolic significance. Figure 1 shows a figure drawn by a female respondent. Results found that interviewees perceived that the child with a lot of possessions would be self-centered and would look down on others. The child with few possessions would have a lot of friends because he/she was kind, sensible and good-hearted. Younger children are simple and direct. They
perceived that more possessions mean more fun, more friends and higher self-esteem.

The link between material possessions and social significance becomes more complex among older children. They perceived that more possessions could bring more fun and more friends, but at the same time could also trigger selfishness, envy and arrogance. Older children also believed that having a lot of toys and cool stuff would have a negative impact on scholarly pursuit (Chan, 2004).

Second, a discourse analysis of 72 lessons in textbooks on moral education for elementary school children in Mainland China was conducted. The themes of consumption values, desirable and undesirable consumer behaviors, and the reasons for adopting these consumption values were examined. Results found that the textbook contents put strong emphasis on thrift and frugality. The consumption values conveyed in textbooks reflect a mix of communistic values as well as traditional Chinese value of long-term orientation and inner experience of meaning. Children were taught that all material goods were the results of human labor. Goods should be used properly. Wasting goods was portrayed as sin. The consumption values taught at schools were in sharp contrast with the consumption values of fun, enjoyment, and self-expression portrayed in children’s television commercials (Chan, 2006).

Both studies provide insights that consumption values are cultural specific. In other words, children in different cultures will perceive people with or without material
possessions differently. The differences depend on the consumption values held by parents, teachers, and the society as a whole. Research is therefore needed to understand the prevalent consumption values in a specific culture that the children grow up. Advertisers should be sensitive to children’s negative association of material possessions among Chinese children. Advertisers can frame the instrumental value of materialism of using material goods to advance social relationship and self-esteem.

Television is the strongest media source from which children learn about gender roles and gender-appropriate behavior (Williams & Best, 1990). Gender stereotype of characters in children’s television advertising is another concern that scholars are interested. Chinese culture has been collective and paternal oriented. We conducted a content analysis to examine how men and women in television advertising broadcast at children’s programming hours were portrayed. Results found that the sampled television commercials were gender stereotypical. Males dominated the voice-overs. Males were more likely to be portrayed in independent roles while females were more likely to be portrayed in relationship roles. Males were more often featured in active, aggressive and anti-social activities while females were more often featured in inactive, dependent, and caring/sharing activities. Commercials targeted at both children and adults were more gender stereotyped than those only targeted at adults (Wong & Chan, 2006).
Regulation of advertising to children

China’s advertising industry is growing at an unprecedented pace (China Advertising Association, 2009). The fast development of the advertising industry has given rise to a range of problems, such as exaggerating the efficacy of medicines and health foods, false advertising, inferior product quality, advertisements of low taste, and sex-explicit contents (Xinhua Economic News Service, 2008).

In studying the regulation of advertising to children in China, we adopted both secondary sources and primary sources. For secondary data analysis, we examined the current regulatory framework, including the Advertising Law, the regulatory administrative organization, the implementation process, and the outcomes (Chan & McNeal, 2004). It was found that advertising in China is mainly regulated by the government. Self-regulation plays a subdued and marginal role (Guo, 2007). The primary government agency in charge of advertising regulation and administration has been the China State Administration of Industry and Commerce. Under the unique Chinese context, advertising regulation is a product of negotiation between the various economic, political, social, and cultural force (Guo, 2007). The State Administration of Commerce and Industry regularly published data about illegal advertising cases that the administrative unit dealt with, and the product categories involved. Advertisements for medicine, medical services, foods, and properties accounted for the biggest share of
illegal advertising activities (China State Administration of Industry and Commerce, 2009).

We searched on newspaper archives (including national as well as regional newspapers) to find specific advertisements that were prosecuted. The China Consumer Association website occasionally published details of advertisements that were found misleading or illegal (Chan & McNeal, 2004). With the help of scholars and advertising practitioners, we interviewed an advertising regulating administrator and several advertising professionals to gain insight about the interpretation of the Advertising Law as well as the implementation details. One interesting thing we found was that the image of Santa Claus was not allowed in advertisements in China because he was considered as a religious icon (Chan & McNeal, 2004).

The case study of our research efforts on advertising and children in China suggests that such research agenda should cover children’s response to advertising, parental attitudes and concerns about advertising to children, the regulation of advertising to children, as well as the possible undesirable effects of advertising. A variety of research methods can be used, including qualitative interviews, surveys, secondary data analysis, content analysis, and theme analysis. Figure 2 summarizes our proposed research framework on advertising and children.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]
We identify two trends in recent international research on advertising and children. First, there is an increasing trend in the use of visual ethnographic method (Davis, 2010). Researchers now combine the use of pictures/photographs and visual narratives to enable the child interviewees to tell their stories. For example, Bartholomew and O’Donohoe (2003) asked children to take pictures of their bedrooms. These pictures were later used to initiate discussions about their possessions. Similarly, Tufte (2007) asked tween boys and girls aged 10 to 12 to draw their own rooms. Chitakunye and Maclaren (2008) asked teenagers to carry a disposable camera around for a week to record their eating-related events. The photos and the subsequent interviews provide a rich data on their eating events and rituals. Kirova and Emme (2008) run workshops for children how to produce comic strips using photographs or drawings with speech balloons. After the workshop, children were asked to create narratives of their school life. In a study on perception of gender roles among girls aged 10 to 12, researchers asked interviewees to use digital camera to take photos from the media they use that show “what girls or women should do or should be” (Chan, Tufte, Cappello, & Williams, 2011). Although not all of these research studies are specifically measuring children’s responses to advertising, the research methods can be adopted to measure children’s understanding of brands, connection with branded possessions, and recall of certain advertisements or marketing activities.

Second, there is an increase in number of studies devoted to children’s responses
to the commercial messages carried in the new media. Kids today are practically born wired. Their lives have been saturated with media and contents, accessible any time of the day, right at the tips of their fingers. Marketers forecast that the number of internet users in the US ages 11 and under will increase from 20.2 million in 2011 to 25.7 million by 2015 (eMarketer, 2011). Researchers employed content analysis and observation to collect data. For example, Muratore (2008) examined online blogs written by teenagers to investigate how they exchange information about brands and other sensitive issues such as eating behaviors and family dynamics. Tingstad (2003) observed the communication on two Norwegian chat rooms and later communicated with several children through emails to investigate the interactions among chatters.

Using laboratory design, researchers showed children printed copies of invented web pages that included advertisements, half of which had price information, and asked them to point to whatever they thought was an advertisement (Moondore et al., 2009). A total of 401 children, aged 6, 8, 10 and 12 years of age, from the United Kingdom and Indonesia were examined. Results indicated a steady increase in recognizing the advertisements on the web sites with age (Moondore et al., 2009). With increasing popularity of child-oriented web sites with advertisements and sponsored messages, as well as product placements in online games, it is envisioned that more research studies will investigate the interplay of commercial messages in the new media and children.
Both trends indicated that researchers now are moving away from the narrow focus of socialization toward an approach that is more prepared to listen to children’s own experiences of their lives as children (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Children are more likely to be seen as independent and competent consumers, rather than vulnerable and unformed beings (Cook, 2008; Davis, 2010).

[I] Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter outlines an overview of the marketing environment in China, and discusses the finding of a large-scale study on urban Chinese children’s responses to commercial messages. Results show evidence of a developmental process of consumer socialization. It also shows evidence of a social learning process from the marketing environment and advertising media contexts. In view of the age differences in responses to different advertising approaches, the current study provides insights for marketers to design creative executions that are most appealing to the target age. The review of parental and public concerns of children’s advertising and examination of the advertising regulation in China indicates that there is a long road to travel for China to develop a mature regulatory system that can provide sufficient protection for consumers’ right and meet international standards. A framework for the study of advertising and children is proposed for future research. Our study therefore provides insights for scholars to conduct research on advertising and children in an international context to enhance our understanding of the current
topics and issues on the topic. Public policy makers can base on the research findings to make decisions about regulations of advertising in the children’s media to enhance a healthy development of the advertising industry and at the same time, to meet the concerns of the general publics, consumers, and parents.

(8,500 words)
Table 1 Model of children’s responses to advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptual stage (6-7)</th>
<th>Analytical stage (8-11)</th>
<th>Reflective stage (12-15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are TV commercials?</strong></td>
<td>Do not understand the persuasive intention of television commercials; consider television commercials to be messages for them to take a break</td>
<td>Great variance among children; some consider television commercials to be messages for them to take a break, some perceive that television commercials inform, some perceive that television commercials persuade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What to TV commercials want you to do?</strong></td>
<td>Understand that TV commercials want them to buy the product or tell parents about it</td>
<td>Understand that TV commercials want them to buy the product or tell parents about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why do TV stations broadcast TV commercials?</strong></td>
<td>Perceive that TV stations broadcast commercials for making money or producing the programs</td>
<td>Perceive that TV stations broadcast commercials for making money or producing the programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived truthfulness of television advertising</strong></td>
<td>perceive that TV advertising is nearly or mostly true</td>
<td>perceive that half of the TV advertising is true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liking of television advertising</strong></td>
<td>Bi-polar views: either liked TV advertising or dislike TV advertising</td>
<td>Bi-polar views: either liked TV advertising or neutral toward TV advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to different advertising approaches</td>
<td>like funny ads and animated ads</td>
<td>like funny ads, animated ads, and public service ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to favorite commercials</td>
<td>want to see the ads again</td>
<td>want to see the ads again or develop a good impression about the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to most disliked commercials</td>
<td>do not want to see the ads again or project themselves into the commercials and feel “that couldn’t be me”</td>
<td>do not want to see the ads again or develop a bad impression about the brand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caption: (Left) This child has a lot of new and expensive toys. (Right) This child does not have a lot of toys.
Figure 2. A proposed research framework on international advertising and children

Parents
- Family communication patterns
- Parental attitudes toward advertising
- Parental mediation of TV viewing and media use

Peers
- Informative and normative peer influence
- Communication about consumption
- Social comparison of consumption

Marketers and retailers
- Marketing communication to children
- Use of celebrities
- Imitation of celebrities

Government
- Regulation of advertising and marketing communication

Desirable consequences
- Understanding of advertising
- Understanding of brands
- Attitudes toward advertising
- Liking of different advertising

Undesirable consequences
- Parent–child conflict about consumption
- Materialism
- Gender stereotypes
- Perception about body image

Children as consumers
References


China Advertising Association. (2009). *China state administration of industry and commerce.* Speech of Mr. Cao Ma-ling, Director, Advertising Regulation


