
The Role of Media Context in the Advertising Persuasion Process: A Modeling Attempt among Children

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Our understanding remains limited as to how a TV program affects the viewers' reactions toward advertisements surrounding this program. This paper tries to shed light on this research topic, by proposing a global conceptualization of the media context effect on the performance of advertisements targeting young viewers. The paper equally stresses the theoretical as well as empirical contributions of this research.

Keywords: *advertising efficiency, child, context effect, intensity of emotions, polarity of emotions, program appreciation.*

In normal exposition conditions, TV advertisements are never broadcast alone. They are inserted in a TV programming context, which is, it likely to influence the performance of these advertisements. Many studies conducted among adults and dealing with media context have shown that the TV program surrounding advertisements is a crucial determinant of the efficiency of these advertisements (Soldow and Principe, 1981; Goldberg and Gorn, 1987; Murry et al, 1992; Mathur and Chattapady, 1991). The context effect can be defined as « the effect of the immediate environment in which a stimulus is found, on the perception of this stimulus, its efficiency in raising emotional reactions or any other post exposition measure. Context is, thus, the emotional as well as cognitive reference framework within

which a message is broadcast...” (Poncin, 2003). However, we want to stress the fact that a literature analysis has allowed us to discover that the academic community has particularly been interested in the emotional and evaluating dimension of the program surrounding TV advertisements.

At the beginning, studies dealing with matters of advertising persuasion have focused on the impact of only one response to a program, that is either appreciation (Schumann, 1986), or emotions raised in TV viewers (Goldberg and Gorn, 1987). As a consequence, neither the correlation between these two concepts, nor their joint causal effect on the advertisement could be investigated. Relying on research works in the field of advertising showing that «feeling» and «liking» are two different and distinct constructs (Madden, Allen and Twible, 1988) and that each of them influences the brand’s evaluation separately (Stayman and Aaker, 1988), Murry et al, (1992) were the first to extend those results to research on the effects of context, through examining the simultaneous impact of emotional and evaluative reactions to the program. They have shown that it is the appreciation of the program that best predicts the viewers’ attitude toward the advertisement (Murry et al, 1992, Coulter, 1998).

The child enjoys a privileged relationship with television; He is becoming a TV enthusiast at an ever-younger age (Lurçat, 1995). Nevertheless, there has been no serious investigation that is likely to show the real relationship between the child, advertising and the TV programs surrounding advertisements. Indeed, very few studies dealing with this young market have pondered the effects of the TV programming context on the child’s persuasion process. Those few studies have so far adopted a one-dimensional approach to the media context. Prasad and Smith (1994) as well as Pecheux and Derbaix (2003) have tackled the program according to its emotional dimension. Only one study, that of Pecheux et al, (2006), has investigated the role of the program appreciation dimension in advertising persuasion. On the other hand, no research has studied the joint impact of these two forms of reactions to a program. Thus, it is not easy to anticipate on how they inter-react and affect the performance of advertising messages. Taking into consideration the suggestions of previous works dealing with adults (Murry et al, 1992; Coulter, 1998), our research aims at filling this vacuum, and is set in this perspective. What is more precisely questioned is

the impact of emotional and evaluating reactions set off by a TV programming context on the advertising persuasion process for a child.

Our objective is to adopt a global approach of the effect of context, by developing and testing a model that involves two qualitative dimensions related to the media context: The audience's attitude toward the program and the audience's emotions while watching this program. Therefore, we propose to explain their simultaneous and relative effects on the advertising responses given by the child, in terms of Aad and Ab. One of the ambitions of this research is to bring to the fore the different processes underlying these effects.

The present work will be organized as follows: We will first present the results related to the impact of emotional reactions raised by a TV program on the advertising performance. Then, we will analyze the role of the appreciation of the programming context in the persuasion process. At the end of the discussion related to each aspect of the research, a hypothesis will be developed. The set of the hypotheses presented will make up our conceptual model. Its discussion will be the object of the last part of this article.

Emotional reactions induced by the TV programming context and attitude toward the advertisement

Some studies conducted in the field of media context have confirmed that TV programs affect the viewers' emotions, which in turn, have an influence on the processing of the advertisements inserted in these programs (Goldberg and Gorn, 1987; Singh and Churchill, 1987; Pavelchak et al, 1988; Mathur and Chattopadaya, 1991). Emotions generated by a TV program are defined as "temporary affective states that are subjectively perceived by an individual". They are, therefore, the set of emotional states felt by viewers during their exposition to the program. According to a review of the literature on adult audiences, the emotional reaction induced by a media context has been measured in two ways, either according to its "intensity" dimension, which reflects the arousal level, or according to its "pleasure" dimension, which reflects the quality or the polarity of this reaction. The latter is the sum of positive emotions (for example joy), or negative ones (such as fear). Only a few research works have examined the

emotional states according to their two fundamental dimensions, i.e., intensity and valency (Nahon and Tassy, 1998; Shapiro et al, 2002; Broach et al, 1995). Yet, distinction between these two dimensions is important since each of them affects the consumer's behavior in a different way (Pavelchak, Antil and Munch, 1988 ; Nahon and Tassi, 1998). The measures of emotions raised by the advertising insertion context, found in studies conducted among children are a little bit different from those used to evaluate adult populations. Hence, Pecheux and Derbaix speak of positive mood versus neutral mood generated by a program. Mood was defined as a "soft" emotional state (Isen, 1984, cited by Pecheux and Derbaix, 2002). As for Prasad and Smith (1994), they mention the degree of violence to measure intense negative emotions versus less intense negative emotions.

Relying on the two-dimensional aspect of emotions and on the way the literature has dealt with the effects of media context in relation with this concept, we will present, separately, the works related to valency and those related to the intensity of emotions raised by the program.

Intensity of emotions and attitude toward the advertisement

It has been demonstrated that advertising could have different levels of efficiency according to the arousal level stimulated in the viewer by the surrounding program (Bryant and Comisky, 1978; Krugman, 1983; Broach et al, 1995; Coulter, 1998). The most common perspective on media context is that involvement in the program or the arousal level raised in the audience, lead to a weakening of the capacity to process advertisements in depth, and thus, to recall scores and attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand , which are of a lower intensity.

A first explanation of this effect is presented by the processing intensity theory. The underlying idea is that a person pays a lot of attention to a stimulus, which causes an intense emotional experience. This makes the decoding and hence the memorization of this stimulus easier (Kroeber-Riel, 1979). Consequently, emotional intensity would weaken the memorization of the stimulus that is not responsible of the emotional experience. By analogy, viewers pay more attention to a TV program that raises more intense emotional reactions. And that being the case, there results a weaker cognitive capacity to process advertisements inserted in this type of

programs, as compared with a program inducing less intense reactions. In fact, the viewer's attention will concentrate on the stimulus that creates the emotional experience, that is, the program, to the detriment of related messages, such as advertisements. Some researchers have confirmed this principle in relation with Aad. Soldow and Principe (1981), have mentioned that advertisements inserted within a program qualified as interesting (a violent detective drama) are not as well-memorized or well-appreciated (perceived as an interruption) as those inserted in "less interesting" programs (a family comedy, devoid of suspense). Such a finding has been stressed by Anand and Sterthal (1992) and by Sanbonmatsu and Kardes (1988).

Steiner (1963) proposes a different interpretation, but one having similar consequences. He states that the interruption of a program by advertisements "bothers" viewers whatever the type of the program viewed, and can affect Aad in an unfavorable way. Besides, it has been suggested that the feeling of irritation caused by the advertisement, "i.e. the level of annoyance with commercials" becomes stronger at advertising cuts corresponding to high arousal levels created by the program. Thus, these negative feelings caused by advertising lead to a negative relation between the intensity of emotions and Aad (Edell and Burke, 1987; Steiner, 1963).

Some research works have led to totally opposite results through supporting the « positive effects thesis », that is, advertisements are more efficient when broadcast within a program that has a rather strong than a weak arousal dimension. The excitation transfer theory proposed by Zillman (1971) has shed light on this result. It shows that when an individual goes through an experience that is emotionally exciting following his exposition to a highly violent TV program, he takes time to readjust physiologically. According to this theory, the intensity of the emotions raised by this program is mistakenly attributed to the advertisements interrupting this program. As a result, the processing of these advertisements will be weakened, and their evaluation improved, provided that the viewer remains "excited" by the program content during his exposition to the advertisement that follows it, but is unaware that the program is the cause of his excitement. This distraction effect goes on for some time, until a cognitive or physiological adjustment (excitation) takes place. These effects on the advertisement appear independently of the

program's hedonistic tone. They are only reliant on the excitation level raised by the program. Mattes and Cantor (1982) and McGrath and Mahood (2004) have confirmed the predictions of the excitation transfer theory.

Other research works have reached the same conclusions without having referred to this theory. In one of the first and famous studies on this topic, Kennedy (1971) has tested and confirmed that advertising messages are more efficient in terms of attitude toward the advertisement when they are broadcast during a program that raises intense emotions in viewers, than when they are broadcast during one that creates less intense emotions. The outcome of a research conducted by Krugman (1983) on the General Electric Company was the same. The explanation he put forward was that the state of arousal raised by a program will remain during the advertisement, thus, affecting Aad and Ab favorably.

The curvilinear shape of the relation between the intensity of emotions raised by the program and the advertisement's efficiency allows reconciling the contradictory results mentioned above. Tavassoli, Shultz and Fitzsimons (1995) are among the very few researchers who have established the reversed U shape of the relation between involvement in the program and advertising efficiency. These researchers stated that memorization and the viewers' attitude toward the advertisement (Aad) are more positive when involvement in the program is moderate than when it is low or high. This observed phenomenon supports the inverted U theory (Kroeber-Riel, 1979). According to this theory, the quality of the accomplishment of a task is a inverted-U function of the individual's activation level: At first, a rising activation makes the processing of a piece of information easier, but beyond a certain optimal activation level, information processing is hindered.

The only study carried out among children aged 7 to 10, and which gets near this issue is in harmony with the negative effects thesis (Prasad and Smith, 1994). Through experimentation, this study has put forward the idea that children who are exposed to an advertisement that is inserted immediately after a segment of a highly violent TV program, show attitudes toward the advertisement as well as the promoted brand that are less favorable than those shown by children who watched the advertisement following a less violent program (which is nonetheless similar in every other aspect).

It comes out of the only study dealing with children—cited above—and of the findings of an exploratory study, which we conducted, that the “negative effects thesis” would best reflect the way children react to an advertising cut that occurs at a moment of high intensity.

It ensures that the child tends to reject the advertisement interrupting a program if the emotional experience lived during this program (detective or action movies) is intense. This leads us to state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The intensity of emotions generated by a TV program has a significant and negative influence on the child’s attitude toward the advertising message inserted in this program.

Valency of emotions and attitude toward the advertisement

Previous research works agree on the fact that emotions created by a program will influence the evaluation and the judgment of advertisements in a way that is congruent with the mood created by the exposition to this program (Gardner, 1985; Bower, 1981; Isen, 1984). The corollary of this is that an advertisement is better appreciated if it is broadcast in a cheerful media context that will raise positive emotional reactions (a comedy, for example), than when the program is sad and hence generating negative emotional reactions (a sad movie, for instance) (Axelrod, 1963; Srull, 1983). Several theories have been proposed to account for the observed mood assimilation effect.

According to the Mood Congruency hypothesis, the mood induced by a programming context activates—during the watching of the advertisement that follows it—some cognition that are stored in the memory, in relation with the promoted product, the people, the events, or any other things that are described in the advertisement, and that have a valency similar to this mood. Thus, a program generating a positive (or negative) mood strengthens accessibility—from the memory—to the positive (or negative) material, which will affect the evaluation of the product and the brand.

Relying on an experimental study, Goldberg and Gorn (1987) have noticed that individuals who have watched a TV program dealing with a

happy theme (a comedy) feel happy while watching a following advertisement, and develop positive thoughts about it, they consequently evaluate it more favorably (they perceive it as being more efficient), which is not the case for individuals who have been exposed to a sad program. It can thus be said that the emotional tone of the generated cognitive responses to an advertisement reflects the mood felt during exposition to advertisements. It also reflects the evaluation of these advertisements. This hypothesis was supported by other research works conducted among adult audiences (Bower and Cohen, 1982; Clark and Isen, 1982; Mathur and Chattopadhyay, 1991; Srull, 1983; Singh and Hitchon, 1989).

Some authors have declared that the temporary association of two stimuli, such as a TV program and an advertisement, can account for the transfer of emotion from one stimulus to the other (Gorn, 1982; Kroeberiel, 1984; Batra and Stayman, 1990). This transfer resulting from a temporary association does not involve the activation, from the memory, of the similar valency material. Therefore, the program's effect on the advertisement's evaluation is not mediated by beliefs drawn from memory, as is the case with the Mood Congruency theory, but it springs from a classical conditioning process in which attitudes are conditioned by mood (Lutz et al, 1983).

The hypotheses of the halo effect and the heuristic effect are also presented as plausible tools to explain this phenomenon. The halo effect can be defined as the unconscious transfer of emotion from one concept (in this case a TV program) to the other (in this case, the advertisement). The "How-do-I-feel-about-it" heuristic effect, on the other hand, stipulates that the anticipated mood about an object can be used as a basis to evaluate this object. These two processes occur when the respondents rely on their emotional states as persuasion peripheral signs, or as a source of information. In relation with the media context, individuals simplify their judgment of a TV advertisement relying on the emotional state they experience while watching a TV program in which the advertisement is inserted (Schwarz and Clore, 1988; according to Pecheux and Derbaix, 2002; Schwarz, 1990). In this case, a person who has positive feelings after having been exposed to the program is likely to provide a positive judgment about the stimuli surrounding it (the advertisement inserted in it). The person

does assume that this environment (the advertisement) is responsible of her pleasant emotional state.

Besides, other studies supporting processes which are different from the emotion transfer process have found out that a positive mood weakens, rather than improves, the processing of advertisements. More particularly, these studies have shown that advertisements inserted in programs perceived as pleasant or cheerful get a less favorable judgment and are not well memorized. Two explanations related to the observed contrast effect have been put forward (Lee and Sternthal, 1999). According to the cognitive capacity theory, a cheerful mood activates very wide knowledge structures in the memory, which weakens the processing of new information (Mackie and Worth, 1989). As for the feeling-as-information theory, it postulates that a person who experiences a positive mood tends to avoid all stimuli (such as an advertisement) that are likely to alter her mood. According to these two theories, after having been exposed to a media context which was able to generate positive emotions, a viewer who is in good spirits no longer pays attention to advertising inserted in this context. He would treat it more superficially and thus, would show weaker Aad and memorization scores.

Finally, other research works have concluded on the absence of any direct effect of the moods generated by the media context on the evaluation of an advertisement delivered within this context. These works have proved the existence of a mediating variable called "Program appreciation". In fact, Murry, Laastivicka and Sing (1992) - in the same way as Coulter (1998) - have shown that whatever the valency of the emotional state (positive or negative) generated by the program, the evaluation of the advertisement inserted in it is first determined by the program appreciation.

Contrarily to the literature dealing with adults, which reports contradictory findings, the literature dealing with children supports the idea of a direct and congruent impact of the emotions generated by a program on the evaluation of an advertisement inserted in this program (Prasad and Smith, 1994; Pecheux and Derbaix, 2003). More precisely, according to a study led by Pecheux and Derbaix (2003), a program inducing a positive mood (cartoons) leads children to evaluate the advertisement inserted in it in a more positive way than it is the case with a program inducing a neutral mood (a documentary about plastic recycling). For moral considerations, these authors have not taken negative emotions into account. According to

the study of Prasad and Smith (1994), a program raising negative emotions would result in unfavorable responses toward the advertisement inserted in it. These findings are in harmony with the theories of mood transfer or also with the mood misattribution theory. Hence, we suppose that:

Hypothesis 2: The valency of the emotions generated by the TV program has a positive and significant influence on the child's attitude toward the advertisement inserted in this program.

Program appreciation and attitude toward the advertisement

It has been proved that the affect induced by the program and its appreciation are two distinct constructs (Madden et al, 1988; Murry and Dacin, 1996). While the emotion generated by the program is a temporary sentimental or affective state (Gardner, 1985), the appreciation of the program represents a conscious global evaluation of, or an attitude toward a TV program (Schumann, 1986). Thus, the program appreciation corresponds to the favorable/unfavorable feature of the judgment of the viewed program by the child.

Studies dealing with the relation between the program appreciation and Aad are few and little conclusive. Schematically, two thoroughly contradictory streams have emerged, reflecting, on the one hand, the positive effects hypothesis, and on the other, the negative effects theory.

The first theory (the positive effects theory) postulates that highly-appreciated programs or those starting off positive emotions will induce more favorable responses on the part of the audience, toward advertisements surrounding them or inserted in them (Schumann, 1986; Murry et al, 1992; Coulter, 1998; De Pelsmacker et al, 2002). Rather than wearing off immediately with the casting of the advertising screen, attention given to a highly appreciated program remains activated. This produces a positive effect on the messages' performance, and a better Aad (Krugman, 1983). All the theories related to emotion transfer, such as the mood congruence hypothesis, the temporary association between the program and the advertisement, the heuristic and the halo effects, are pertinent to account for such an effect, that is the fact that the persons who appreciate a

media context feel a positive mood and report this attitude or this mood to the advertising stimulus (De Pelsmacker et al, 2002).

The second hypothesis, that of the negative effects, supports opposite consequences: advertisements inserted in a well-appreciated program are perceived as an interruption which contrasts with the deeply positive experience undergone by the viewer during the program. Advertising messages tend to be physically avoided or mentally filtered, which may result in weakening the attitude toward the advertisement (Steiner, 1963 ; Steiner, 1966 ; cited in Schumann and Torson, 1990). This observed phenomenon, that is the fact that advertisements which are inserted in appreciated programs get a less favorable judgment, reflects a process that is different from that of emotion transfer. In particular, this finding supports the hypotheses of the cognitive capacity theory and the feelings-as-information theory, mentioned earlier in relation with the negative effect of positive emotions raised by a media context on the efficiency of an advertisement.

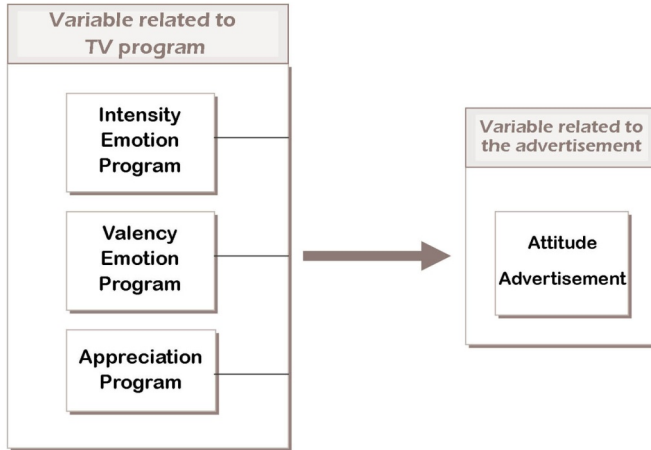
The only study carried out among children which focused on the role of program appreciation in advertising persuasion has reached a result that agrees with the negative effects stream (pecheux, Derbaix and Poncin, 2006). It follows from this research that the appreciation of a program is negatively correlated with Aad. In other words, an advertisement that is inserted within a program which the children do not like (the news) is perceived as more efficient than one that is introduced in a pleasant program (Star Academy). This finding is in agreement with the one reached by Greer et al (1982), for whom attention toward an advertisement increases if the latter contrasts with the program.

By analogy with the findings of Pecheux, Derbaix and Poncin (2006) and Greer et al (1982), and contrarily to the predictions of the mood transfer theories, we suppose that the appreciation of a program by the child has an unfavorable effect on the advertisement's performance in terms of Aad.

Hypothesis 3: The appreciation of a TV program has a negative and significant effect on the attitude of the child toward the advertisement inserted in this program.

The conceptual model

The figure below schematizes the conceptual model we are proposing. This latter consists in the integration of the different constructs mentioned above.



In this conceptual frame, the valency of the program-induced emotions, their intensity, and the appreciation of the program appear to be determinants of the attitude toward the advertisement.

Discussion and conclusion

This article was meant to conceptualize the media context effect on advertising performance among a population of children. For this purpose, we have first analyzed the main theoretical and empirical works carried out on this theme, in relation with two fundamental dimensions related to media context: the appreciation of the program and the emotions that the program generates in the audience. After this survey, two conclusions could be drawn. On the one hand, we noticed that the current state of knowledge is marked by a lack of consensus on a variety of themes. Thus, several theories, having opposite consequences, have been developed to account for and predict the effects of the programming context on advertisements. As a

corollary, the findings in this field are characterized by a lack of coherence. On the other hand, we noticed that the theme of the media context effect has not been enough investigated among young audiences. Hence, an exploratory qualitative research was conducted among children. More precisely, several observations were realized in different kindergartens. Our conceptual model, together with the body of hypotheses underlying it, has eventually been developed. Overall, it is the negative effects stream which best represents the program impact on children, through the dimensions of emotion intensity and appreciation. Nevertheless, it is the positive effects theory that is best adapted when it comes to the transfer of the valency of the program-induced emotions on the children's responses to advertisements. We need to precise, here, that an experimentation was conducted on 400 schoolchildren aged 10 to 12, in order to test our model empirically.

The theoretical interest of the research

Researching the effect of media context involves numerous academic implications. This work makes it possible to shed light on a research field that was not well explored in the field of marketing destined to children. Moreover, the conceptual model which we propose corresponds to a thoroughly new global approach to the media context effects on children. Indeed, it is most probable that the media context impact would be underestimated, overestimated or misunderstood, if we ignored the joint and relative effect of the emotions raised by the program and its appreciation. Once validated, the model would provide a more refined understanding of the underlying mechanisms of the program effects on children (assimilation effect vs. contrast effect). Hence, it widens the knowledge related to the children's attitude formation processes under the effect of media contexts.

The managerial interest of the research

As for managerial implications, this study primarily interests media planners. It helps them in their choices when they have to buy advertising spaces. It is equally interesting for advertisers, as it provides them with a

new control criterion to be used in pretesting the efficiency of their advertisements in terms of attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand.

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