

Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies



Cross-Cultural Reception Analysis of Selected Commercials
on
Ethiopian Television (ETV) Amharic Program

By
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June, 2008
Addis Ababa

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Abstract

The role of advertising in market economy is to inform as well as educate consumers about products and services. To achieve these goals, advertisers employ a variety of cultural values in their appeals.

Today one of the most contested issues in advertising strategies is the role of culture. The main focus of this study is the role of culture in media messages and the reception of them. How Ethiopian audiences draw on local or western cultural resources or a combination of the two, in their meeting with different media texts will be central.

A qualitative research method is often considered the most appropriate in audience reception studies, and this was also the case here in this study. The study follows a three stage qualitative approach; which include qualitative content analysis, focus group interviews and in-depth interviews with individual viewers.

For this study, a two stage sampling technique was used for selecting commercials to be content analyzed. The first stage comprised the selection of specific time intervals when ads are broadcasted; two different segments of prime time (prime time I and II) were selected. In the second stage, twenty commercials for food and drinks that were running during the six months' research period were randomly selected. Regarding the audience sampling, a purposive sampling technique was followed. Audiences categorized to be among the target audiences were purposively selected.

The qualitative content analysis of the selected commercials revealed that western values are predominantly recurring themes, rather than more local or traditional themes. A central reason was given by the advertising agencies, which argued that western values were much more powerful and had a more homogenizing effect than the local values.

With regard to the audience, it appeared that audiences, regardless of their level of education, are active and powerful in the meaning making process and reshape the content of media messages. The study also explored how external factors like social context, age, marital status, and personal contact are present in the processes of meaning making of ads which reflect either western or traditional Ethiopian values.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Advertising is vital in a consumer economy. Without it, buyers would have a hard time knowing what products and services are available. Advertising, in fact, is essential to a prosperous society. And is also the financial basis of important contemporary mass media (Vivian, 2002: 300).

Modern broadcast advertising is a highly complex activity that draws upon the interrelated work of a variety of organizations. With its powerful combination of communication components, it has become one of the leading advertising medium in the world (Howard. H, and Zeigler.S, 1984).

In main, advertisement has an important role in democratic societies by generating most of the operating revenue for newspapers, magazines, TV and radio broadcast .Without advertising many media on which we rely up on for information, entertainment, and the exchange of ideas on public issues would not exist as we know them (Wright et al.,1982).

The Ethiopian television, the only visual electronic media in the country also mainly rely on ads for its income. As indicated in the editorial policy of Ethiopian Television Agency, one of the main objectives behind transmitting advertising on the station is to generate and increase revenue (Ethiopian Radio and Television Editorial Policy, 2005).

Ethiopian television started its service on the emperor's coronation day, on October 23, 1965 E.C. In 1969 E.C. the Advertising and Distribution Agency was founded under the then Ministry of Information and Tourism. Its purpose was "to promote the advertising industry and to promote trade" in the country. However, after two years without doing much the agency was contracted to Ethio-marketing, a private enterprise (Girmay, Y. 2005).

During the Derg regime, the rationalization of private companies resulted in the disappearance of advertising agencies and almost all commercials. The only advertisements survived were censored government notices and announcements of services and information on a few organizations including Ethiopian Airlines, Banking and Insurance services (Ethiopian radio advertising manual, undated).

The fall of the Derg regime and the introduction of the free market economy after 1991 have made the advertising sector to revive and flourish in Ethiopia.

Nowadays, advertising agencies are booming in the country operating both in the print and electronic media. Referring to Ethiopian Television, currently there are lots commercials appearing everyday. Apparently, different cultural values are promoted by the commercials as they advertise products.

Advertising uses different values of the society to appeal to and influence the values and attitudes of people. “Advertising in the aggregate has the potential to penetrate our consciousness and channel our very mode of thinking.”(Pollay, 1986:21).

Mainly, this study is based on the assumption that advertisements may be seen as a reflection of cultural values. The main concern of this thesis is to analyze the relationship between advertising and the cultural and social systems in which it operates; how the values are portrayed and how the audience respond to.

In most cases, consumers will not admit being persuaded by commercials, but our contention is that one is ever coerced by advertising to do anything. True, most commercials are designed to persuade but listeners and viewers are always free to accept or reject messages, products and ideas (Howard.H, and Zeigler.S, 1984).

Thus, it would be of importance to give concern to audience research and know how audiences actively engage in the process of generating meaning and the factors outside the media that may influence their reception.

Regarding the purpose and significance of audience research, Mc Quail (2002:360) states the main goals,

- measuring actual and potential reach for purpose of ads
- manipulating and channeling audience choice behavior
- evaluating media performance in a number of ways
- improving communication effectiveness

Thus, the Ethiopian television audience, with its diverse culture and values and social make-up may react to advertisement messages in a quite wide-ranging manner. This study will attempt to see how audiences react to (interpret) the advertising messages with respect to ‘food and drinks’ advertising messages hitting the air waves.

In addition, the thesis, will try to explore the factors that may influence audience reception.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Hyun (1990) observes that an advertising text is culturally contextualized; that is, its meaning is based on the consumers’ interpretation or perception (when it is decoded) of the messages. As a result it is assumed that advertisers tend to encode their messages by adapting the cultural values, languages, ideas and norms shared by a group.

In some societies of the west it may be true that advertisers and consumers to a larger degree share some commonly derived sets of meanings. But this is more questionable in the developing nations like Ethiopia where for instance imported western values and the consumers differ to a large degree.

Nowadays the advertising environment in Ethiopia is booming both in variety and volume. So it is common to see advertisements on television, radio and on the internet. Billboards and posters are also becoming quite common as a medium for advertisements.

Scholars like Stuart Hall (1980), cited in Williams (2003), argues that consumers understanding of messages is influenced by socially shared values, beliefs and systems. However, with regard to commercials appearing on ETV, advertising agencies predominantly rely on western values to promote their products. As a consequence, the meanings consumers ascribe to the encoded messages might not be the intended message that the advertisers convey.

Moreover, with respect to the cultural values and the social systems under which the advertising operates, it becomes a concern what consequences would the unintended decoding bring on the society. As Pollay (1986) in his well known metaphor of ‘distorted mirror’ argued that if advertising is a mirror of cultural values ‘it is a distorted one’.

Also , as to the knowledge of the researcher only a couple of researches were conducted focusing on advertisement; the portrayal of gender roles on ETV ads and the other is content analysis of selected commercials. Thus, no prior research was conducted focusing on the audience; its making of meaning and reaction to contents of ads of diverse nature.

1.3. Research Questions

In order to get along with the objectives of the study, the following questions will be relevant.

- What pragmatic knowledge and frame of interpretation do audiences bring in their use of media content?
- What types of ads are presented on ETV and how do their variables portrayed?
- What are the factors that influence the interpretation of ads in the society?

1.4. General Objective

The general objective of the study is to explore how the target audiences interpret advertisement messages promoting local and western values.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study include

- To find out how advertisements made with cultural elements from the local cultures and traditions and those with western elements respectively, are interpreted by the target audience.
- To explore factors that impact on and vary the audience's understanding and interpretations of ads.
- To describe how cultural both local and western cultural values are portrayed in the commercials.
- To find out which ad types are more appealing by the target audience and why.

1.5. Significance of the Study

In this research gaps are expected to be identified with respect to how consumers make sense of media text in their social situation. Thus, the comparative and descriptive analyses are expected to offer an in-depth understanding of the characteristics, similarities and differences in advertising strategies. I also hope that this study will provide a comprehensive cross cultural approach to the analysis and interpretation of the verbal as well as visual content of advertising. Findings of this study will also be expected; to help advertising agencies, the government and the entire group of consumers to be aware of the different social/cultural effect of message-audience relationships. This also would help advertising agencies to produce advertisement messages that could be received by the consumers as intended. This study may also be used as a basis for future studies in order to examine the comparative effectiveness as well as social-cultural effects of various types of advertising messages.

1.6. The Scope of the Research

The study is entirely focused on advertisements for 'food and drinks' aired on ETV in relation to the Amharic programming. Similar types of commercials made in other languages (local/international) are not included in this study.

Referring to the sampling, the study covered a six month of ETV Amharic prime time I (the air time right after the 8:00pm evening news) and prime time II (Sunday Amharic daytime entertainment program segment advertisements). The content and data analysis focused on core values that may represent western and local/ Ethiopian cultures respectively.

As to the qualitative analysis it analyzed twenty commercials which are randomly picked. The researcher also involved six focus group discussions with a total of 36 respondents to be able to study how the ads were received.

1.7. Limitations of the Research

Given the limitation of time and resources, the researcher had to limit his sampling size. Data were collected during a period of six months on prime time I and II viewing hours. The researcher found it difficult to include ads from other programs because of language and the above mentioned constraints.

The results could have been much more generalizable had there been adequate time and resource available.

The absence of local researches and well documented and organized data had also compelled me to rely on the context of the findings in other countries and this might as well be a limitation to this present study.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Literature Review

2.1. Media Effects - From Influence to Interaction

In the early days of the mass media common sense leads many to believe the media has a strong influence on people's attitudes and behavior. And as to John Vivian, this belief is also true to researchers on media; "Early mass communication scholars assumed that the mass media were so powerful that ideas and even ballot box instructions could be inserted as if hypodermic model into the body politic." (Vivian, 2003: 366).

Thus, historically, in the early 20th century lots of researches and widespread belief emerged on the influence of media over people and society.

According to Fleur and Rokeach (1989:164, cited in Williams, 2003) the earliest theoretical perspective on media effects has been described as 'hypodermic – needle' or 'magic bullet' theory. They stress that, "whatever its label media messages are received in a uniform way by every member of the audience and that immediate and direct response are triggered by such stimuli." (Williams, 2003: 171).

Williams explained the 'hypodermic model' as an approach which assumed media effects as simple and direct; a casual connection existing between what people, see, hear and read in the media and their knowledge, attitudes and behavior (Williams 2003; 166).

Initially the idea called 'powerful effects' theory drew heavily on social communication by Walter Lippmann's influential 1922 book 'public opinion'. As stated in Vivian (2003) Lippman argued that we see the world not as it really is but as 'pictures in our heads' shaped by the mass media (Vivian, 2003: 366).

The powerful impact that Lippmann ascribed to the media was a precursor of the powerful effects theory that assumed that the media could inject information, ideas and even propaganda into the public.

However, a scholar like Williams (2003) strongly denounces/denies the existence of 'hypodermic model', and he described the weaknesses of the model as; "It doesn't address the influence that intervenes between the messages from the media and the opinions and attitudes people hold. It also denies the audience, the capacity to interpret, discount or distort."(2003:166).

In addition, experimentally, the hypodermic model was rejected as unscientific, unsophisticated by a research study conducted during World War II in America.

Hovland and Lasswell had undertaken a research to assess different sources of propaganda on American personnel which gradually eroded the direct effects theory to which they had subscribed (Williams, 2003: 174).

Tudor (1979) cited in the same book, remarks their finding as; "the recognition that the effect of a particular item or image was not a simple linear consequence of the content of that item or image."(quoted in *ibid.*: 175)

Thus, doubts arose in the 1940s about whether the media were really that powerful, and scholars began shaping their research questions on assumptions that media effects are more modest.

The fact is that individuals read, hear and see the same things differently. Even if they did not, people are exposed to many, many media messages and hardly a single monolithic voice. For instance, as Vivian argues there is a skepticism among media consumers that is manifested as it is extreme in the saying "you can't believe a thing you read in a paper" people are not mindless, uncritical blotters (Vivian, 2003:367).

2.2. Minimalist Effect Theory

As a consequence, the belief in the 'all-powerful media' put under the scrutiny of early empirical research. For instance, researchers like Lazarsfeld, et al., (1948) in their classic study of voters in the 1940's, declared that the media's impact on individuals was weak and short lived. (Cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2003: 240)

Lazarsfeld et al., go on to argue that social characteristics such as class and religion were more important than the media in explaining voters' behavior. (ibid.: 241)

Thus with this new emerging paradigm, the media had hardly any direct effect, and the powerful effects theory needed rethinking. From that rethinking emerged the 'two step flow model'.

2.2.1. Two Step Flow Model

Minimalist scholars devised the two step flow model to show that voters are motivated less by the mass media than by people they know personally and respect.

Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955 developed the notion of opinion leaders in subsequent work on how women made decisions about politics, consumer products, films and fashions (Cited in Williams, 2003:175).

In this classic research, Lazarsfeld and Katz documented that "whatever effect the media have was often argued through 'two step flow of influence'." The media transmitted information to opinion leaders who pay close attention to the news media (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:241-242).

The minimalist point is that personal contact is more important than media contact. Vivian also pointed out that the two step flow model, which replaced hypodermic model showed whatever effect the media have in the majority of the population is through opinion leaders (Vivian, 2003).

As to Burran and Davis (2006) the strengths of the 'two step flow model' are mainly; it challenges simplistic notions of direct effects; stresses the importance of opinion leaders information of public opinion. And they put the reason for the limitedness of the effect as 'mitigation of a variety of mediating or interesting variables' (Burran and Davis, 2006: 138).

In addition, scholars like Croteau and Hoynes (2003) try to support the two step flow paradigm by explaining the holes in ‘hypodermic model’;

The problem with this ‘hypodermic model’ was that it left out the active agency of the reader of media messages. This early model ignored the pre-existing ideas and orientations of the reader. The minimal effects model gave more insight to the ability of the reader to select, screen and judge media information. The reader, after all, is not a passive sponge soaking up media messages but an active, thinking individual capable of ignoring or resisting media messages. (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003:242)

Later, as mass communication research became more sophisticated, the ‘two step flow model’ was expanded into a multiple flow model to capture the complex web of social relationships that affect individuals. (Vivian, 2003: 368).

2.3. Use and Gratification Studies

Limited effects research in the 1960’s abandoned the focus on opinion leaders and concentrated on the use made by the people in general of the media (Williams, 2003:177).

According to this approach the audience’s needs and desires are the determinant factors in the process of understanding media messages.

Similarly, Vivian (2003) viewed this approach as; “the reevaluation of the idea that assumed people as passive consumers of media content.”(Vivian, 2003: 367).

Williams also discussed the three basic assumptions of this approach;

First people actively use the media for their own purposes; second people know what these purposes are and can articulate them, and third, despite the variations between individuals in their use of the media, it is possible to identify some basic patterns in Use and Gratification (Williams, 2003: 177).

Ross and Nightingale (2003), though they embrace Use and Gratification for being the first to champion the cause of the active audience by shifting the emphasis from what the media do to people, and placed the issue of what people do to the media, they also

criticize it for failing to locate the message on audience in a wider social context (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:28).

Ross and Nightingale (2003) further narrowed down the influence of the Use and Gratification theory. They point out that this approach is only feasible and was most successful in explaining media use in extreme situations like war, natural disaster and election. This is because in such situations people of diverse nature will unite together to meet their 'needs' for specific information (ibid.:28).

The failure of this approach to explain media effects in a broader social context has made scholars to recognize and divert their focus to macro level understanding of media and the audience.

2.4. Media and Social Context Paradigm

Subsequently, as the criticism of 'use and gratification' for being too oriented towards the micro level; then, gradually cultural effects theories seek to understand the broader impact of the media on how we understand the society and how we collectively think (Tudor, 1979). Tudor also underpins that "this represents a shift from examining as a source of individual effects to understand them as articulators of culture."(quoted in Williams, 2003:188).

In line with the social context paradigm, Mc Quail (2000) asserted that media were shown to operate within a pre-existing structure of social relationships and a particular social and cultural context. He goes on to suggest that these factors took primacy in shaping the opinions attitudes and behaviors under study and also in shaping media choice, attention and response on the part of audiences (Mc Quail, 2000:167).

Williams further emphasized the conceptualization of media in a broader social context; "people exist within groups and their immediate set of social relations was seen as important determinant of their understanding of media messages."(Williams, 2003:194).

As a result, the shortcomings of the “uses and gratification’ theory motivated researchers, particularly those in United Kingdom, for example the cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, to frame their approaches to audience research within different theory traditions (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:31).

2.5. Active Audience and Construction of Meaning

The discovery of the ability of audiences to make meaning has produced ‘active audience theory’ which has established itself as a new orthodoxy in media studies (Williams, 2003). Williams further noted that audiences are no longer seen as an undifferentiated mass of passive recipients of messages but a multitude of different groups with their own histories, habits and social interactions (ibid.: 193).

Today, the concept of audience transformed from perceiving audiences as ‘mass entity’ to various fragmented pieces. Audience can thus be defined in different and overlapping ways by place (as in the case of local media) by people (as when a medium is characterized by an appeal to a certain age group, gender, political belief or income category); by the particular type of medium or channel involved (technology and organization combined); by the content of its messages (subject matter, styles); by time (as when one speaks of the day time or ‘prime time’ audience or an audience that is fleeting and short term compared with one that endures (McQuail, 2000:265).

Subsequently, scholars have sought to examine the nature of these specialized audiences, attempting to identify the factors that shape their interpretations and understandings of the output. As Williams put it; “they have also sought to examine how different groups of people interpret and make sense of messages in different ways (Williams, 2003:197).

Thus, recent research has begun to focus on this type of audience activity of making meaning that suits their purpose. The manner in which people actively impose meaning on content and construct new meaning that serves their purposes better than any meaning that might have been intended by the message producer (Burran and Davis, 2006).

2.6. Hall: Encoding/Decoding Model

The encoding decoding model focuses on the relationship between the media message, as it is constructed or 'encoded' by a media producer and the ways that message is interpreted or 'decoded' by audience.

Hall's model represented a shift in the effects debate by making the influence of media dependent on people's interpretations and thought processes. It moves away from a behaviorist stimulus – response model to an interpretative model of media messages (Alasuutari,1999:3).

Halls starting point is to attack Behaviorist Theories of media. Models of 'effects' such as Laswell's formula theorize the communication process in terms of its reliability. "If messages are not received as intended, this is deemed to be a failure of communication in a technical or behavioral sense."(Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 31).

According to the 'effects' perspective, messages are not received correctly if the channels of communication from sender to recipient are distorted by electrical or human errors. In this concept the meanings of messages themselves, however, are assumed to be distortion free and universally transferable (ibid.: 31).

But Hall argues that Behaviorist Models are flawed because; "they fail to situate media communications within existing social, economic and political structures." The meanings of messages, then, are able to be distorted and interpreted differently intended to the position of producers (senders) and audiences (recipient) within this existing structure (Laughey, 2007:61).

In addition, this pioneering Behaviorist approach of Lasswell was also criticized for neglecting the role of the audience in the communication process.

As McQuail and Windhal (1999:14) point out;

The Laswell formula shows a typical trait of early communication models; it moves or less take for granted that the communicator has some intention of influencing the receiver and, hence, that communication should be treated mainly as persuasive process. It also has assumed that messages always have effects (quoted in Laughey, 2007:68).

Hall provides a more dynamic understanding of how the media construct meaning and how people make sense out of it. Hence, he distinguishes three possible kinds of decoding/ reading of media contents: Dominant, Negotiated and Oppositional reading (Williams, 2003).

As Williams clearly explains; “The ‘dominant or hegemonic’ reading accepts the preferred reading encoded in the text. The oppositional reading occurs when people understand the preferred reading, reject it and decode meaning according to their values and attitudes. And a negotiated reading is when people adapt rather than completely reject the preferred reading.” (Williams, 2003:196).

Thus, Encoding and Decoding are interrelated since they are dependent on same media text. However, Hall emphasized that a particular decoding doesn’t necessarily arise from a specific encoded meaning. In other words, interpretations are open to dominant, negotiated on oppositional meaning.

According to Shaun Moores (1993), Hall developed his approach in part as a reaction against a tradition of Marxist film criticism that was centered on the film journal ‘Screen’. This tradition viewed mainstream popular films as inherently deceptive and supportive of an elite dominated status quo.

However, Hall objected to the cultural eliticism inherent in this criticism. He stresses; “it was wrong to assume that popular films necessarily are subvert to working-class audiences. There will be cases in which such films actually made movie goers less supportive of the status quo.” (quoted in Burran and Davis, 2006:276).

Thus, Hall's encoding/decoding model is an attempt to rediscover and rescue ideology from its conception as an omnipotent, oppressive force wielded by the ruling classes upon the masses in the classical Marxist tradition of political economy theory.

Furthermore, as a critical theorist Hall goes on to argue that most popular media has a preferred reading that reinforces the status quo. But, in laying out his views about decoding; he declares that, in addition to this dominant reading, it is possible for audience members to take alternate interpretations (ibid.:276).

Later on, other researchers like Barbero (1993) reaffirmed the possibility of differential decoding though people are susceptible to domination by communication technologies. "They are able to exploit contradictions that enable them to resist, recycle and redesign those technologies and people are capable of decoding and appropriating received messages and are not necessarily duped by them."(Barbero, 1993:225).

In line with this, Hall emphasized social factors, in particular class, rather than individual inclination or preferences as determinant of the decoding process (Williams: 2003).

Moreover, Marie Gillespie, in her book *Media Audience* (2005), also asserts that Hall's cyclic model brings the issue of social life which previously got in the way become the focus of the analysis. As to Gillespie, Hall also changed the notion of encoding; "the media message no longer treated as a stimulus but rather as a text whose meaning is polysemic, negotiable and to be interpreted"(Gillespie, 2005:99).

If media messages are open to various interpretations, as Hall declares, then it will be incomplete to study media contents solely. Hence additional questions will need to be asked: where do these interpretations come from? And what are the factors that shape and influence the meanings of media messages?

Later on a student and colleague of Hall, David Morley, tasted Hall's insight in his famous study of the television series 'Nationwide': Based on his findings he challenges

Halls model and argued that social class could not necessarily determine people's interpretative nature and ability (Williams, 2003).

Nevertheless, Lewis, (1991: 59 cited in Williams, 2003) criticized Morley that; "he had over simplified the relationship between someone's class position and the meaning he or she gave to TV program". As to Lewis, Morley later admitted that other social variables such as, age, gender, ethnicity, are often as relevant as class background in shaping the way in which people make meaning out of media messages (Williams, 2003).

In addition, scholars like Croteau (2001 cited in Croteau and Hoynes 2003), elaborates how class influence interpretation. He says 'social class and we would add age race, ethnicity and gender play a key role in providing us with cultural "tools" for politics. (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003:277)

Croteau and Hoynes (2003) go on to argue that among the media related cultural tools are discursive resources, for example; the language, concepts and assumptions associated with a particular sub-culture on a political perspective. Therefore, according to these scholars meanings are multiple and are constructed by socially located audiences.

2.7. Kinds of Interpretations (Polysemy of a given text)

Since the meanings of media messages are not fixed – they are amiable to various forms of interpretations constructed by audience members.

Sometimes there could be a close correspondence between the intended meaning and the ways a particular audience interprets the message. Stuart Hall distinguishes such kinds of decoding as Dominant. According to Hall, the dominant or hegemonic reading accepts the preferred reading encoded in the text. Furthermore, for some scholars like Croteau and Hoynes (2003) the similarity is occurred due to shared values. "Some meanings will be easier to construct because they draw on widely shared cultural values and sets of assumptions about the way the world works."(Croteau and Hoynes, 2003: 273).

On the other hand there might be some level of correlation between the ‘intended messages’ and the way they are interpreted. Such ‘decoding’ are as we saw above, distinguished by Hall as ‘negotiated reading’ – whereby people adapt rather than reject the preferred reading.

Laughey (2007) labeled such readings as ‘second possibility’ in that an audience member adopts a negotiated code which accepts some preferred meanings of media production but opposes others.

Third and finally, according to Hall (Hall, 1980: 137-8), an audience member may as seen above, completely disagree with the preferred meanings of media producers, in which case they adopt an ‘oppositional code’ and decode the message in a globally contrary way. (Cited in Laughey 2007)

Similarly Williams (2003) states; “the oppositional occurs when people understand the preferred reading, reject it and decode meaning according to their values and attitudes.”(Williams, 2003:196).

In addition, for scholars like Burran and Davis (2006), oppositional decoding is far beyond rejecting of the preferred meaning. They describe it as “the part of the construction of a sub-cultural identity that embodies a resistance to traditional norms and rules.”(Burran and Davis, 2006:315).

2.8. Consumer Resistance vs. Political Economy

Political economy is associated with classical Marxist theory and Marx’s statement (in 1859) that social consciousness is determined not by the collective will of individuals but by the ruling classes who own the means of capitalist production (Laughey, 2007:122).

Marx in his view of political economy argued that culture and cultural production as the basic instrument of the upper class to manipulate the mass; which in turn perceives the audience as inactive.

Marx expressed the relationship between economy and ideology in terms of his basic super structure model. As Marx argued “economic systems do not develop out of people’s beliefs and values but rather cultural values are determined by the nature of economic structure.” (Williams, 2003:95).

Though Marxist theory clearly recognizes the role of the media as a means to promote a certain set of views and ideas, scholars criticize the theory for failing to indicate other oppositional views and ideas and also for portraying the audience as passive actors.

Williams recognizes both pluralist and post modernist approaches rejecting Marxist view of ownership and control. According to Williams, both of these approaches emphasize the power of the audience or the consumer to determine the output of the media (Williams, 2003: 95).

In particular, the pluralist states: “the consumer is sovereign in the market system. It is he or she who decides what to read watch or hears and owners must respond to what their audiences want if they want to make profit.”(ibid: 95).

In similar line, cultural theorists like John Fiske celebrate the power of the audience resisting the ‘preferred reading’ of the producers. Fiske (1987, 1989) describes the role of television as “an inherently polysemic medium that invites a diversity of audience readings.” He has advanced the argument that within the basic social constraints of cultural production under capitalism, viewers do have a relative autonomy to act as members of a ‘semiotic democracy’. (Cited in Schoder, 2003).

Furthermore, according to Strelitz (2000), Fiske’s focus on the active audience enables him to downplay the importance of institutional production by retheorizing ‘production’ as part of ‘consumption’.

As Fiske posits;

Every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning. At the point of sale the commodity exhausts its role in the distribution economy, but begins its work in the cultural. (Strelitz, 2000: 40).

2.9. Advertisement and Cultural Values

A central point here is to discuss the concept of culture in order to understand the role of cultural values in conveying advertisement messages.

Lee. M, and Johnson, C. (1999) define culture as; “a body of tradition, habits, religion, art and language consisting of beliefs, morals and customs learned from others.” (Lee. M, and Johnson, C. 1999: 31).

With respect to the influence of culture on individuals, Mooij (2005) points out; “individuals are conditioned by their socio-cultural environment to act in a certain manners” (Mooij, 2005:135).

Along similar line, Mooij (2005) also emphasize the importance of cultural values in advertisement while attempting to build relationship between consumer and brand. “Advertisement must reflect our ideas, our values, our acts and our emotions, as we are individuals under the guidance of cultural patterns and historically created systems of meaning.”(ibid.: 137).

Referring to consumer behavior and advertising, Wright et al., (1982) argue that strong influence on consumer behavior comes from the culture in which people live.

Wright et al., further explain; “Culture represents the ideas, values, attitudes, artifacts and symbols governing the behavior of a member of the group; it determines many of the responses that individuals make in a given situations.” (Wright et al., 1982: 228).

On the other hand, global culture advocates argue that the world becomes united to the extent that it is regarded as one singular place and viewed local values as less efficient in influencing consumers (Mooij, 2005).

Harvard professor Ted Levit ignited a debate over how to achieve global media coverage. He argued that new technology would lead to homogenization of consumer wants because consumers would prefer standard products of high quality and low price to more customized high-priced products (Cited in Mooij, 2004: 5).

This theoretical fraction emphasize that the different parts of the world is growing ever closer, and that the world can be treated as one large market.

Opposing Levit, Mooij argued; “as people around the globe become better educated and more affluent, their tastes actually diverge. With increased wealth, people increasingly accord greater relevance to their civilizational identity.” (ibid: 4).

As a consequence, according to Wells et al., (2003) the outgrowth of this debate has developed three main schools of thoughts on advertising in another country.

Standardization: This school of thought contends that differences between countries must be more a matter of degree than directions, so advertisers must instead focus on the similarities of consumers around the world. In this view advertising and marketing can be standardized across cultures, and the same values can be used to persuade to buy or consume the product.

Localization (adaptation): This school of thought argues that advertisers must consider differences among countries, including culture, stage of economy and industrial development, stage of life cycle, media availability, research availability and legal restrictions. Hence, according to this school, any marketing (advertising) campaign should, in their view, reflect the local habits, lifestyles and economic conditions in order to be effective.

Contingency (moderate): This school of thought reasons that neither complete standardization nor complete adaptation is necessary and that a combination of the evaluation of factors can affect the effectiveness such advertising.

According to Wells et al., (2003), the realities of the global advertising suggest that the contingency approach is the best. These marketing researchers argued that though advertisers are challenged by language, regulations and a lack of completely global media, still, the trend toward global markets is inescapable. The challenge for advertisers is to balance the national and global plan to maintain efficiency (Wells, et al., 2003:376).

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted related literature that was hoped to shed light on the research under question. It discussed how media theories shifted from ‘all media powerful’ conception to recognizing the role of audience. Different models and approaches that help to see how audiences make meaning and external factors influencing the audiences’ perception are also dealt with.

The next chapter discusses the methodologies used to conduct the research.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Research Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

3.1. Research Design

Based on the discussion of the previous chapter two, the meaning of an advertisement can not be taken for granted: It is not in the message only. Meaning is created in the reader's encounter with the advertisement; it depends on the cultural codes and communicative resources at the disposal of each individual reader; and it must be researched through qualitative empirical work (Schoder et al., 2003:108).

Thus, in attempting to generate empirical data on the reception of commercials on ETV, this study followed a qualitative research design. As can be expected of a reception study; the study mainly focuses on interpretations of a certain media message; how do readers make sense of commercials?

Similarly, Mytton (1999) posits the advantages qualitative method brings forward in audience research as "in qualitative method researchers have found very useful ways of understanding human behavior, exploring how media messages are interpreted." (Mytton,1999:126).

Thus, as a methodological approach to reception analysis, qualitative method is considered to be appropriate when studying the manners in which viewers realize their experience of commercials as media material.

In this light, this chapter deals with the methodology chosen to carry out the research and discusses the research design, sampling process, the various methods of data collection and data analysis.

3.2. Sampling Method and Data Collection

“A reception study always begins with curiosity about how people experience a media product, the answer to the question of who to recruit is almost given in advance” (Schoder et al., 2003). To this effect, the sampling strategy selected for this study was theoretical purposive sampling.

As the basic agenda of the process of purposive sampling is to get participants who suit the study, the aim of the process of sampling was to identify appropriate participants who could best inform the subject matter under scrutiny. As argued by different scholars informants are selected non-randomly because they possess particular characteristics (Frey et al., in Schroder et al., (2003).

Scholars like Silverman (2005) treats ‘theoretical’ and ‘purposive’ sampling as synonyms. As to Silverman, the only difference between the two procedures applies when the ‘purpose’ behind ‘purposive’ sampling is not theoretically defined.

The nature of this link between sampling and theory is set out by Mason,

Theoretical sampling means selecting groups on categories to study on the basis of their relevance to ones research question, its theoretical position and most importantly to the explanation or account which one is developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constituting a sample which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or a certain criteria which help to develop and test your theory and explanation. (Silverman, 2005:130)

Furthermore, Bryman (1988:90 quoted in Silverman 2005), also emphasizes that, “...the issues should be couched in terms of the generalizability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes.” (Silverman, 2005:130).

As the purpose of this study is to explore how audiences make sense of selected advertisements on ETV, the researcher implemented three different stages to be collaborated with one another and with the theoretical framework. The three stages

include; qualitative content analysis, focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews and will be developed further in the following.

3.3. Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is chosen as one of the methodological approaches. It is believed to allow the researcher to systematically analyze the manifested content of the commercials through the selection of units of analysis.

According to Flick (2002), this “enables a distinction to be made between the objective facts of the situation and the interviewee’s subjective definitions of the situation with a view of comparing them.” (Flick, 2002:75)

Moreover, Schoder et al., (2003) further crystallizes the importance of qualitative content analysis as “it enhances the knowledge of the researcher about the media product in order to be able to conduct a meaningful and focused conversation with the informants about it.” (Schoder et al., 2003: 155). To this interest, commercials aired in ETV Amharic programs during the period from September 13, 2007 to March 13, 2008 were collected and qualitatively analyzed.

Accordingly, the researcher would also believe that these selected sample commercials would help to steer the dynamics of the interaction in the group discussion and are also relevant to the objective of the study. In line with this, the researcher also found out that during this six month period there was not any special occurrence that enforced to change the content of the commercials aired.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

As to the purpose of this study, the national Television of Ethiopia (ETV) was selected. This is because from the two television stations currently in practice in Ethiopia, ETV is the only station that broadcasts commercials and it is also the only station that has nationwide coverage.

Meanwhile, I employed a two stage sampling process; one for the selection of the time interval by which the commercials are broadcasted and the other for the selection of the type commercials.

According to the information I got from the advertisement department of the Ethiopian Television, most commercials run during the Amharic programs and they give two main reasons for this;

1. Language preference

Since Amharic is the national language of the country, it is widely spoken by the majority of the people. Thus, advertisers would prefer their commercials to be broadcasted during the Amharic program/session.

2. Prime Time factor

The station classified the time allotted for commercials into three categories; Prime time I, (8pm-10pm), Prime time II (During Sunday entertainment program), and Normal time, which includes all the air time allotted for advertisements other than the above two. And, according to the data recorded in the department most advertisers prefer to be broadcasted during prime time one and two.

Prime time I

Prime time I is believed by advertisers to be the best time to get their target audience at a wider level.

Since the commercials run right after the evening news, it is at this time of the day that the advertisers believe to get the whole family's attention during dinner time, after work, and after school.

Prime time II

The other most preferred time by advertisers is prime time II, which is during the Sunday afternoon entertainment program. This program is preferred by advertisers for various reasons;

- It is the only entertainment program the station has since the last 7 months (from September 13, 2007 to March 13, 2008).
- Since it is a weekend program a diversity of people expected to watch it with the family at home.
- Based on the different surveys carried out by the advertisement department of the

Ethiopian Television and the station the program was found to be the most heavily watched program of the station.

Thus, the researcher considered commercials that are running during these two ‘prime-times’ and that are expected to address the majority of the people most interesting for this research project. Furthermore, since the main purpose of this study is to find out how the target audiences interpret/sense the media messages, it was believed to obtain the appropriate audiences meeting the objective of the study.

3.5. Sampling Techniques

3.5.1. Selection of Commercials

For this study, commercials of ‘food and drinks’ were selected by purposive-sampling for the following reasons,

- As to the primary observation carried out by the researcher the various elements found in food and drinks commercials (like dressing styles, settings, characters, and music) suit the research agenda and the theoretical perspectives.
- Moreover, according to Mooij (2003), food carries cultural meaning that varies with climate, historical, economic and cultural factors. He further argues that; “the symbolic function of food being stronger in collectivist culture than in individualistic cultures” (Mooij, 2003:123).
- Also since ‘food and drinks’ are primary concerns, the researcher would think it will steer discussions based on common grounds and on a wider level of shared assumptions.
- Referring to the data compiled by the advertising and sells department, ‘food and drinks’ commercials constantly run on ETV than any other commercials with wider diversities.

A total of 20 commercials of ‘food and drinks’ were selected that are broadcasted on both prime time I and II but are non redundant. Random sampling was applied to select 20 commercials among the ‘food and drinks’ commercials aired during the six month time interval. This is because it was not manageable for the researcher to analyze all within the

time limit. As Silverman (2005) posits qualitative research design tends to work with a relatively small number of cases.

This also helped the researcher to carry out a meaningful and focused discussion with the participants by analyzing the selected commercials. Flick (2002) also acknowledges that “the use of texts, images, etc would further stimulate the discussion or topics to be dealt with during the discussion.” (Flick, 2002:116). In addition, these selected commercials were also used to qualitatively analyze the content of the commercial and give a broader sketch about their nature.

3.6. Focus Group Interviews

As to the belief of many researchers like Jensen (2002) focus groups allow interaction of ideas among participants and also enable them to compare and contrast other’s opinion with their own. As one of the research methods to facilitate the gathering of qualitatively rich information the researcher had choose focus group discussions. As Morgan explains “the hallmark of focus group is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group.” (quoted in Schoder et al., 2003: 176).

Patton also sees the group interview as,

Highly efficient qualitative data collection technique (which provides) some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views and it is fairly easy to asses the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view among the participants (cited in Flick , 2002:113).

According to Blumber, such a group discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet one another’s disagreement, will do more to lift the veils covering the sphere of life than any other device that I know of.(cited in Flick, 2002:114).

In line with the theoretical paradigms of reception analysis, Schoder et al., (2003:160) puts gender, age, education and political observation as the social characteristics that were deemed likely to influence people's perception of advertisements.

Thus, for the focus group discussion in this study, the researcher above all recruited people who are able and willing to provide information and to be representative of the population of interest.

To accomplish this, the researcher implemented the approach known as 'snow-ball technique'. This approach usually starts out with contacting an acquaintance or a friend of a friend, who is then asked to bring together a specified number of other people, who live up to certain specified characteristics (Schoder et al., 2003).

Hence, as the aim of this study is to examine how audiences' interpretation of advertisement may vary according to their age, education, status, gender and social context, participants were selected in a way to represent the mentioned population using theoretical purposive sampling.

According to Flick (2002), "the number of groups to be conducted depends on the research question and on the number of different population subgroups required." (Flick, 2002: 120). Cognizant to this, six focus groups will be used that would help answer the research questions and represent the different subgroups.

The first group consisted of working males with high level of education (college degree or higher) and between the age of 25-50. The second group was composed of university students, both female and male, between the ages 18-25. The third group consisted housewives. And the fourth group was composed of working females with high level of education (college degree or higher) and between the age of 25-50. The fifth group was from educated members of the same family and the last group was from lower educated family members from the same family. In due course, it was tried to avoid heterogeneous groups. This is because, as Schoder et al., (2003) elaborate, the flow of natural discussion is likely to be impeded if people can not establish a modicum of common ground and a common wave length. He further goes on to argue that cultural taste is still, to a large

extent, an area characterized by segregation, in spite of the leveling developments of the postmodern age (Schoder et al., 2003).

Thus, the researcher believed that homogeneously composed groups encompass sufficient idiosyncratic differences to trigger a lively discussion.

All the groups excluding the second group were selected using snow ball sampling. For the second group, the university students were selected from a naturally existing community, Addis Ababa University, using purposive sampling.

In addition, the researcher had also tried to avoid settings and environments that may create discomfort. The researcher carefully selected locations that would make the informants feel at 'home'. Thus, the majority of the discussions were held in suitable rooms with a video player and TV set.

In order to further stimulate the discussion on the specific topics to be dealt with during the discussion session the selected commercial were played to the discussants. This is because, as Flick (2002) acknowledges; it “supports the dynamics and functioning of the group.” (Flick, 2002:16).

Since it will be difficult to memorize every thing that one would like to talk about during the interview, the researcher had prepared a similar interview guide relevant to the research agenda prior to the discussions.

Moreover, the consistent use of an interview guide increases the comparability of the data and their structuration is increased as a result of the questions in the guide (ibid.: 8).

3.7. Individual In-depth Interviews

Individual in-depth interviews with selected focus group participants were also conducted to corroborate with and deepen the data obtained from the focus group discussions.

According to Schoder et al., (2003) the depth obtained is, first of all, due to the objective circumstance that an individual informant gets to say far more, and has greater opportunity to develop an argument or a narrative.

During the focus group discussion, participants who were active, enthusiast and influential were selected purposively from each group. The type of interviews conducted was of the semi-structured type, in which the informant were encouraged not to wait for the next question, but to speak freely about the advertisements, making associations from the advertisement to other aspects of their working and private lives.

In addition, expert interviews were also held with three managers of advertising agencies and the advertising department head of ETV to further analyze the findings by giving insight of the encoder's perspective. Measer and Nagel (1991, cited in Schroder et al., (2003:89) see the expert interviewee not as a single case but "as a case representing a group".

3.8. Data Gathering Techniques

During the interview and discussion session, the researcher used hand written notes and audio taping for data gathering. As flick (2000) explains using machines for recording make the documentation of data independent of perspectives those of the researcher as well as those of the subjects under study.

The researcher had also tried as much as possible to transcribe every meaning and sense that were made by the participants to ensure exactness.

In order to prevent single participants or partial groups from dominating the interview, one assistant moderator also worked together with the researcher during the discussion session.

3.9. Data Analysis Procedure

When attempting to analyze issues of cultural elements, it is vital to have certain tools of a dimension that represent the cultural elements under study. In doing so, many of the research assumptions are designed based on the core cultural variables that represent that peculiar culture.

For instance as Mytton (1999) witnesses most of the researches done in the west have a strong emphasis on the individual choice and decisions in various research methods, as individualism is one of the core cultural variables of the western society.

On the contrary, according to many communication scholars, other high context oriented countries like Africa and Asia give much more emphasis to group decision making and responsibility (Chan and Cheng, 2002). Accordingly, the researcher had recognized the importance of conducting cultural studies under the framework of basic cultural variables that represent that given society.

In this study, I tried to analyze the most important cultural elements that are able to identify western and Ethiopian cultures; and those variables that are used in the commercials that run on ETV. This is because as Mytton (1999) explains, studying all the cultural elements requires a thorough understanding of how the different societies operate, and deeper anthropological studies which may not exist already and can take a long time to complete.

Pollay's (1983) value based coding framework has been used by several studies. Since the framework was based largely on a North American perspective, researchers from other parts of the world such as China (Cheng,1984,Cheng and Schweitzer,1996)and Japan (Maeller,1987) have modified the original framework to fit their own cultural context while other simply select only those values that fit their research objectives(cited in Tizita, 2007:29).

Generally these scholars have identified the core values of western culture as, individualism, youth, modernity, enjoyment and fun, status , control over nature and sex-appeal (Cited in *ibid*: 31).

Since the majority of the values stated above are also found to be the recurring themes in the commercials that promote western values running on ETV, I had used those mentioned values as representatives of western culture and as a reference for the analysis.

The core African values

African scholars such as Obeng-Quaidoo (1986) points out the importance of considering core values in carrying out cultural studies. He metaphorically states “any discussion of methodological innovations without considerations for the underlying cultural imperatives is like a captive mouse gyrating forever.” (Obeng-Quaidoo,1986:91). As a result, he attempted to identify the likely core values of African cultures.

Similarly, the researcher would believe that the following core values are closely related to core Ethiopian values. Hence, these core values were taken as measurement for core traditional Ethiopian values as they are quite similar in Ethiopian world view too.

Religion as a way of life

The African’s world view evolves around one supreme God or Allah but below this God or Allah are the lesser gods who listen to people’s prayers and supplications , and at times dish out reward or punish according to their deeds. Africans often consult their gods in order to determine the outcome of major events in their lives such as marriage, job promotion, farm production and even murder.

The value of time

African value systems do not value time in the linear fashion. Time, in the traditional African thought, is a symbol for events. The future is absent because time and events which lie in it have not taken place, and, therefore can not constitute time.

The non- individuality of Africans

Apart from the celebrated extended family system which encompasses everyone within the immediate clan , people from a similar village tend to regard each other as brothers , sisters , uncles, aunts, nephews, godfathers, unless there is a conflict or friction among families in the village.

Respect for old age

In Africa those who attain old age are viewed as having honored their duties, obeyed the supreme God and the lesser gods, adhered to cultural mores, and worked for the good of

the community as they led their lives. This explains why the caring for the old age is considered as the primary duty of the members of the extended family.

Most importantly, the scholars noted that the above classification does not exhaust all critical core values. The researcher also believes that such a framework has made the qualitative analysis more systematic. In the process data were categorized into a common frame of analysis structured in the discussion guide and parts of interview that carried important views were also included.

Jensen (2002) describes thematic coding as a process that comprises to varying degree, the comparing, contrasting and abstracting of the constitutive elements of meaning. He further explains particularly the importance of thematic coding to qualitative research as; “it is the very occurrence of a particular theme or frame in a context of communication which is of interest to qualitative research.” (Jensen, 2002: 247).

Conclusion

In general, this chapter elicits important insights in understanding the methodology that this study employs. As reception analysis is commonly related to qualitative approaches, the researcher implemented a three stage analysis method. In so doing, it was also tried to incorporate the relevant theoretical perspectives underpinning the methodology and the practical situations that the researcher put under study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

4. Introduction

In this chapter data gathered from sources and their findings are analyzed. In the process, the analysis, discussions, and interpretations are incorporated by the theories discussed in the literature review. The findings are presented from the qualitative analysis, focus-group discussions, and in-depth interviews.

The section starts with a qualitative analysis of the contents of the commercials. This gives a broader sketch of the nature and general characteristics of the commercials under study. Following the content analysis, the findings from the six focus groups with a total of 36 respondents, and an in-depth interview with six interviewees were analyzed thematically. In addition, results from the three expert interviews are incorporated.

In order to achieve the objective, the findings are analyzed and presented in four major thematic frameworks.

- Qualitative content analysis of selected commercials
- The consumers' general awareness about commercials and why they watch commercials (reasons for consumption)
- Reception of commercials and meaning making
- Major factors influencing the consumer's behavior in meaning making.

Below, the groups involved in the group discussions are listed;

FGD	Focus group discussion
FGD 1	Male groups with high level education (University degree and higher)
FGD 2	Females with high level education (University degree and higher)

FGD 3	Male and female university Students
FGD 4	Housewives
FGD 5	Members of educated family
FGD 6	Members of lower educated family

4.1. Qualitative Content Analysis of Selected Commercials

As indicated in the literature review earlier, it is of significance to analyze the content of advertising messages with respect to the values used. This is because such studies would help in pinpointing the correlation between advertising messages, sense-making and the social context of the audience under study.

Furthermore, as Berg (2001) explains qualitative content analysis allows a scholar to explore the ideological mind set, themes, topics and symbols revealed in an artifact such as advertising.

Alaniz and Wilks (1995) also noted that, in recent years, scholars have begun to show their impatience with the mere counting of symbolic of objects, an approach typically employed in content analysis. Instead, scholars have turned their attention to critical analysis to study advertising texts holistically.

Thus, in order to make a broad sketch of the themes and images in ‘food and drinks’ commercials, the randomly selected commercials are qualitatively content analyzed.

4.2. Commercials Reflecting Common Ethiopian Values

The researcher categorized the commercials promoting western or local /traditional values based on two frames of references. The first is Pollay's (1986) 'advertising value measurement' framework as it is also discussed in the third chapter. The other is based on the variables thought by African scholars to be common and representatives of most African nations. According to Obeng-Quaidoo (1986) the core African traditional values include ; religion as a way of life, supremacy of community over value of individual, respect for old age, closeness to nature, collectivism and family. Accordingly, the researcher also believes these traditional values as representatives of Ethiopian values.

It should also be noted that these core values are not the only representative values, nor do they mean that differences do not exist. Rather, scholars contend these values are considered universal amongst Africans. Similarly, when the content of the randomly selected commercials are analyzed, the following appeared to be the recurring and dominant themes of 'food and drinks' ads in prime time I and II viewing hours of ETV.

Family

AS Ethiopians have established long standing traditional norms with regard to family, the commercials try to promote family relations as reflections of self identity, social acceptance and morality. To this effect, the commercials manifest the role of the family in the society through different other values. Usually the producers portray caring, love and togetherness and dependency of extended family in their commercials.

Collectivism

Like African values, Ethiopian culture in general is recognized for the supremacy of collectivism over individualism. To this effect the commercials convey their messages through this core value, collectivism. The producers, hence, promote the power and importance of communal norms over individual interests in their messages.

Respect for elderly

Ethiopians embrace old age and perceive it as a source of knowledge and wisdom, and view the person as spiritually accepted personality. Thus commercials manifesting such values show older people in the society treated with respect and dignity and also symbolize them as emblem of the society. Moreover, while promoting products, the commercials portray the leading role of the elders in the community and their power in decision making in the household.

Setting and life style

The occasions used by the producers are preferred to be places that are closely linked to natural settings. Mostly, the commercials use farms and ancient buildings to promote their products. Similarly, traditional Amharic songs that represent traditional ceremonies are also used commonly. With regard to their dressing styles, the commercials promote different traditional dresses that are worn in different traditional ceremonies and holidays.

For instance, “Benny Spice” is one of the commercials which demonstrate such core local values. The commercial mainly uses ‘the role of the family’ in Ethiopian society to promote its product. Because family is recognized as emic value, other values are also embedded in this concept which is common in the majority of Ethiopian households.

In this TV spot, the commercial begins by portraying members of a large family surrounding and seated by the edge of the bed giving care and support to one of their sick family member lying on the bed. Looking so much worried, they beg the person to try to eat different types of western meals (pasta and pizza) and however, he refuses it all. Instantly the mother rushes in from the kitchen wearing traditional dress and carrying a fresh local meal called “shero” which is the staple meal of Ethiopians. As the mother approaches her son, he immediately rises up from his bed and starts to eat voraciously.

Ideologically, the ad implies that the man eats the local food because of “Berry Spice” the mother used as an ingredient. As the final scene represents the dining room, the elder parents were curious and start to discuss if the food is edible during fasting period. This,

in turn tries to promote religion as one of the primary concerns and the core value of an Ethiopian family.

There are also commercials that promote values peculiar to Ethiopia in certain manners. These commercials manifest unique values like ‘the traditional wedding ceremony’ and other values that are embedded in it, such as Amharic wedding songs, traditional dances and local wedding dresses.

Apparently, even though these values underpin the fact that though traditional values are common among Africans, differences do also exist.

A good case in point is the TV spot that advertise the product ‘Royal Candy’. The commercial manifest the ‘Habesha wedding ceremony’; portraying an extended family members highly engaged in preparing themselves for a wedding in a common Ethiopian household.

With regard to the setting and the character’s mood, all the family members are chanting, dancing and are busy of decorating the room with traditional costumes. In the middle of the room the father is seated proudly wearing the typical wedding dress and seen as ordering everybody in the house to carry out different activities.

In Ethiopia, as a custom, candies are thrown at the bride and the bridegroom when they arrive at their parents’ residence. Though it is not common for elder people to get involved in candy throwing ceremony, at one point, the father is seen while making himself ready to get involved in that event ignoring the families disinterest. In the process, the commercial displays trays full ‘Royal Candy’ lining up on a table, ready to be thrown at the newly wed couple. Then the commercial tells us that ‘Royal Candy’ is always the best choice in such great occasions for its tastiness and quality.

With regard to the message conveyed, the advertiser portrays people from different age groups to imply that ‘Royal Candy’ is consumed regardless of age. Moreover, by depicting an extended family the commercial promotes the advantage of togetherness /collectivism in social affairs of such a kind. Moreover, it also shows how elder people

are influential in decision making even in changing normal patterns of life to their interest as it is seen in this piece.

4.3. Commercials Reflecting Western Values

Though studying the dominant values manifested in the commercials is not the main intention of the study, it finds that amongst the randomly selected 'food and drinks' ads western values are the recurring themes. That implies that both foreign and domestic companies predominantly rely on western variables to advertise their products.

Apparently, beer commercials are a good case in point, as their main themes of these commercials to be quite similar.

Setting and lifestyle of characters

As the content of the commercials are qualitatively analyzed, it was revealed that the commercials could be easily judged for using sex-appeals as the dominant value.

The characters commonly are found to speak and act seductively and dressed in a manner that can easily be interpreted as erotic. With regard to the setting, for instance, the majority of beer commercials prefer the setting to be bars, pubs and disco houses.

Referring to food ads they prefer to use settings like high standard restaurants and luxurious dinning rooms in a bid to convey their messages.

Individualism

As it is being the core value of western tradition, in the majority of the food ads individualism is reflected highly. In the food ads the producers prefer to use mostly nuclear family and individual living styles.

Pleasure seeking

The characters in most cases are represented in a clearly relaxed situation. For instances, in beer commercials the characters primarily consume beer to unwind themselves and to relax.

Technology and social status

High tech equipment and devices are quite common in ads of such nature. The producers happened to use lap-tops, computers and up to date cooking apparatus. As to the social class, the majority of the ads refer to use higher social class and life style in most cases. This then indicates that the ads to be unrepresentative of the wide range audience which exist in different social classes.

The commercials also tell the audience to indulge themselves in these products because the advertisers claim that drinking beer brings happiness, good health and enhance life.

Another example, which uses western values, is a juice commercial that advertises the product 'Maaza Mango'.

The TV spot begins by showing a couple seated in a park. They are laughing, and caressing each other as she leans on his chest wearing short jeans that exposed most part of her lower body. At a distance, there is a man who apparently reads a newspaper but also looks absorbed by the couple. Then as the boyfriend walks away leaving the girl alone, the man rushes to her as her NBA skirt and short wave in the wind. After standing for a while near her he breaks the silence saying that he wants something. And she replied with a question. "Do you want my cell phone?" showing him her cell phone in her purse. Rather, he says he wants the half empty bottle of juice next to her. As she gives him a full bottle of the juice, he returns to his seat and gulps the juice without taking his eyes off her.

In sum, as these examples have illustrated, the values that appeared predominantly appear in 'food and drinks' commercials represented a mix of Ethiopian values; togetherness, family and respect, and western values like technology, beauty, individualism and sex-appeals. But it was found out that western values are often preferred to local values to convey commercial messages.

4.4. Data Analysis and Development of Themes

One of the objectives of this study is to investigate the audience's understanding of the essence of commercials and their role in the decision making process. In doing so, it was attempted to reveal their awareness and understanding about commercials holistically and the reason behind their consumption of commercials.

The following extract illustrates how the different respondents view advertising,

FGD 3 (D) "I understand commercials as light entertainment. Commercials are just images that promote fun and pleasure."

FGD 5 (A) "For me commercials are messages that briefly inform people what to buy and not to but indirectly."

FGD 1 (B) "Commercials are messages that give information about the best quality products."

FGD 6 (B) "Commercials in most cases are false stories and information that deceive people and takes to fantasy"

FGD 3 (B) "Basically commercials are short lectures that teach about best fashionable clothes, and modern life styles."

These various views of commercials forwarded by respondents generated interesting discourses that reflect how audiences understand the objective of advertisements. The majority of university students understand commercials as fashion enablers or arbiters that help them create their own images.

Furthermore, all highly educated working male and female respondents showed an understanding of the basic essence and role of commercials in their discussions. However, content appeared to matter most with regard to family members of lower education background. Interestingly this group seemed most concerned about protecting the local culture and traditions.

As the following extract from the discussion with family members of the lower education background explains,

FGD 6 (B):“I understand commercials as instruments that got hidden agenda. Commercials are foreign cultures and traditions that teach our children and the whole society to function out of the norm.”

(A):“Consumerism is not our culture in the first place, it is imported from abroad. Besides, we Ethiopians have our own way of communication, that is, we communicate at different ceremonies and religious celebrations about our life and different things. That is our means of communication. I don’t see the significant of using such means to tell about products.”

With regard to exploring “why audiences consume commercials on ETV?” the discussants yielded important points. Interestingly, regardless of gender, all higher educated working respondents showed a clear understanding of ‘what ads are for?’ during the discussion, however, they pointed out that they tune in for reasons not intended by the producers;

FGD 1 (C) “Mainly, I watch commercials when I get bored and feel tired, to fantasize and ease my mind. I have no interest at all because I don’t take the information as reliable.”

FGD 2 (D) “I just perceive commercials made in this country as short dramas or plays. Mostly the characters focus on how to dramatize the piece and do not focus on giving information about the products.”

In seeking to know why they deny the main aim of the commercials, namely to sell the products, generally, three main reasons were underscored during the discussions. Primarily, the majority of higher educated working respondents of both sexes point out that the majority of commercials running on ETV are made by very few advertising agencies. As a consequence, one advertising agency is happened to advertise similar products of different brands by using the same characters and a similar voice in several ads appearing consecutively even during the same evening. Secondly, they also stress that, in most cases, the advertising agency managers (owners) are the major characters in the majority of the commercial pieces shown on the station. This then has a tremendous

effect in damaging the truthfulness of the commercials and the reliability of the messages embedded.

This scenario is clearly illustrated during one of the in-depth interviews held with one educated working female respondent.

FGD 2 (E):“Some of the characters on the commercials seem omniscient. In a Single night they show up in dozens of commercials. They appear as doctors, managers, investors [...] besides they also happen to advertise similar products of different brand consecutively, with no worry about placement. So how could you expect messages of such nature to be credible and truthful?”

The third important point raised by the discussants was the down side of the shortage of expertise and trained professionals in the field in the country. They highly criticized the advertising agencies for not operating under the ethical guidelines of rules.

On the other hand, the head of the advertising department of ETV forwarded another point. He places the absence of official advertising regulatory body to the fore as to why audience’s perception and view towards commercials vary and is even distorted. He warns that the three codes of ethical issues are under threat, as he accused the majority of ad agencies as “socially irresponsible”.

He then states his wary,

“The majority of commercials reaching to our department to be aired do not consider ethical issues. They mostly pay attention to powerful and appealing words to promote their products. They do not give slighter attention to the images they chose and their consequences. So mostly, we try to regulate extreme cases by screening and rejecting ads that are extremely below the standard and that are thought to bring detrimental effect to the society. For instance, we do not air cosmetics and food and drink ads unless they are certified from the Federal Quality Control Agency.

Thus, this indicates that the media is serving as a regulatory body under the editorial policy of ETV. However the absence of advertising regulatory institution might pose a question on the relationship among advertisers, agencies and the media.

The majority of university students of both male and female take commercials for another purpose than the one intended by the producers. They stated that they watch commercials, especially of 'food and drinks', in order to adapt western variables.

During the discussion one of the female student explains;

FGD 3 (A): "I always watch food and drinks commercials because it is just like putting oneself in the modern world. In watching such commercials, my main benefit is I get to introduced myself to new hair style styles, timely and fashionable clothes. I even watch it deliberately to learn dancing steps and stylistic table manners that show especial occasions like dating."

This is also quite similar to the view of male respondents;

(D): "The main reason I watch commercials is because I enjoy watching beautiful models dressed fashionably. It is in rare cases we see ladies in such a mood. I also watch it to learn techniques of approaching girls, and also new dressing styles."

In line with this, an interesting result emerged in the discussions held with housewives with regard to why they watch commercials. The majority of housewives said that they watch commercials because it gives them good information about products. However, though they watch commercials as to get information about products, the majority appeared to be selective to the content of the commercials. They seemed much more interested in watching and even to believe the messages to be true when it comes to commercials that intend to reflect their real life experience than when the scene took place in a more western setting.

One of the objectives of this section is to explore the general attitude and also to have an idea on why people in general watch commercials. The different groups from different sections of the society yielded different important points. And, as a finding, almost all the groups except respondents from the housewives, appeared to use commercials for different purposes.

Particularly, the majority of respondents from higher educated working respondents, regardless of gender, appeared to be less interested by the information they get from the ads. They explained that lack of professionalism and unethical practices are the main

reasons that compel them to read the commercial messages for differently than what the intention with them were.

With regard to university students, they watch commercials not to get information about products, although they are assumed to be one of the potential consumers of the products. But rather consume the messages to get inspiration from the settings and to “modernize” themselves, as they stated.

The housewives revealed to rely on the information they get from commercials to make decisions on products, however, they are found to be content conscious. They intend only to rely on messages that reflect their lives and social settings.

4.5. Reception of Commercials Promoting Local Values

Mainly, the objective of this study is to do comparative analysis on the target audiences’ reception of ‘food and drinks’ commercials promoting western and local/Ethiopian values. Thus, in this section some selected video tapes were introduced to the discussions.

Commercials promoting core African / Ethiopian values were purposefully selected and played in order to stimulate the discussions and bring in their shared experiences to the floor. In the process, the dominant values manifested in these commercials, as also discussed previously in the content analysis session, are; extended family, respect for the elderly, collectivism and closeness to nature, local dressing styles and traditional music of Amharic language.

Regarding the reception of the messages, it appeared to be one of the hottest, most engaging and debatable discussions appeared between higher educated working discussants of both sexes.

In this section age is revealed to be the determinant factors in the meaning making process. All the relatively young educated male respondents (of age 25-35) and all female

respondents of similar age interval understood but rejected the messages. Where as relatively older respondents of both groups (35 years and above) received the messages as they were intended.

Some of the meanings are constructed as follows:

FGD 2 (C): “I absolutely understand the fact that these commercials are trying to reinforce local values in the watcher’s mind. But if you analyze the commercials critically, they are full of pitfalls. For instance, in one of the commercials the producers try to promote extended family as a good value portraying them as helpmates. However, to my understanding, the message is promoting poverty. Rather than promoting family planning, the commercial has chosen such backward values that encourage the family to reproduce everyday.”

FGD 1 (A): “The commercial is also trying to show what is really going on in traditional Ethiopian household. It portrays family love and caring. But I do not see the use of these values in the modern world. If you see the whole burden of the housework is falling on the mother, which is quite out dated and must be avoided. Mothers, still, in the majority of Ethiopian households are suffering from overburden and inequality. Thus, we need to take extreme care when we promote values of such character.”

(B): “Mostly, our culture promotes dependency on one another by the name of caring, love, religion or whatever. We naturally tend to rely on nature and destiny than hard work and success. Unfortunately, producers try to win our heart by promoting such values. Which, as to me, has no place in today’s world.”

On the contrary, the majority of housewives and respondents from both family members (regardless of education) largely received the messages of these selected commercials as intended. They largely are found to respond positively to their fundamental social situations, as explained by them below;

FGD 4(A): “The message is quite clear and understandable. It tells that it is only the mother who can prepare delicious food in the household. Besides it also shows the power of being many in number in a family setting and its significance in time of trouble.”

FGD 5(E): “We Ethiopians are perfect in preparing spices and spicy foods. So it is quite real and true if the sick man rejects the western food, even though it is made of spices. Our local foods are so spicy and delicious, that is why even a sick person eats it voraciously as portrayed in the commercial.”

Meanwhile, the researcher came across one important finding while conducting in-depth interview with a married and relatively elder educated working female. It emerged that although she accepts these traditional norms, she is not happy with the norms that deny her decision making abilities and on the conditions that restricts her freedom. She stressed that she takes messages of such nature as true and reliable and they even force her children to abide by these norms and values. This is because, as she explained, she thinks that such values are somewhat connected to religious norms and she also think that it would bring public acceptance and respect.

As the interviewee illustrates:

FGD 5(A):“Actually it is true that the more individualistic life we lead, the simpler our life would be. As to me the message is quite clear and understandable thought it is away from our exiting life style. But no matter what the case may be we are the product of our society and culture. I believe that our traditions and norms must be protected as they are the bases of our identity.”

As stated in Croteau and Hoynes (2003), theorists believe that interpersonal contact to be much more influential than the media in affecting a change in belief. This is because it involves the desire for social acceptance that is part of all direct social interaction. (2003:242).

On the other hand, from the other discussion held with university students, it emerged that almost all of the discussants, with no difference in gender, rejected the messages that used local values to promote products. During the discussion, they showed no interest towards the ads. Also, they pointed out that such traditional values and norms are fading away in the contemporary world that makes the messages not worth watching.

They, then, read the messages as follows;

FGD 3 (B):“It is true that the message tells the reality of my home. It is my mom that always cooks the meal for the whole family. But I do not tell these things to my friends at the university. Most of my friends are from they higher class and their moms are rarely engaged in housework.”

(C):“There is nothing interesting in these commercials. Rather they are boring and I do not want to waste my time watching these. I mean.... There is nothing new and educative in it.”

(F): “These are very old settings; they are not appealing and catchy. It rather looks that an old product promoted in old style. There is nothing that fits with the time.”

Another important point yielded was that fewer members of the housewives and some members from the educated family members read and attached themselves to the messages in different ways from their counterparts.

Because their lived experience is different from the ones portrayed in the commercials, they did not tend to take the variables as “normal and realistic”. Unlike their counterparts, they argued that the commercials have exaggerated and reinforced values and norms that are fading away and almost unrepresentative. As one of the informant put it “with regard to the urban consumers, I am sure that the majority of the audience now is well aware of the downside of extended families. It is now even considered as a shame to construct such families.”

Thus, although it is difficult to generalize, from the discussion it emerged that social class and lived experience matters in meaning making. Similarly, Hall as cited in Croteau and Hoynes, emphasized social factors, in particular class, rather than individual inclination or preferences as determinant of the decoding process (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003:196).

Referring to educated working male and female respondents, the majority of relatively young respondents tried to point out what they call “negative values” embodied in the commercials. Regardless of gender, these younger discussants criticized the local norms as major factors hampering social development.

A 31 years old female respondent in one of the in-depth interviews viewed;

“In country like Ethiopia where by hundreds of cultures and sub-cultures exist, it is very much probable to convey messages that are embedded with negative values that may bring unintended consequences in the society. So I am always critical of the messages that I consume.”

As to educated male and female respondents, in most cases, are cynical about the messages; they consume media products of such content by redesigning it to fit their

interest. Therefore, one important finding is that age played a significant role in changing the meaning of the preferred meaning which is produced by the advertisers and also shows how they negotiate meanings with media texts. On the contrary, relatively elder members of the same groups, regardless of gender, tended to be interested towards local values. These elder members appeared far more positive and keen towards local values than their younger counterparts.

4.6. Meaning Making of Commercials Promoting Western Values

As indicated in the content analysis part; the majority of ‘food and drinks’ commercials predominantly use western values.

With regard to the content of ‘food stuff’ commercials ; technology (computer, lap-top, I-pod, ...) , western music (English hip-hop songs), sex-appeal, individualism and higher living standard which is quite detached from the current Ethiopian setting, are found to be the recurring themes.

Similarly, commercials of ‘Drinks’, especially of beer, find to be very similar in their nature; with elements of pleasure seeking, sex-appeal, and erotic dressing styles.

With regard to the setting, as also discussed in content analysis part, almost all producers prefer to use bars, pubs and restaurants and dancing moods to advertise their products.

Generally, one important finding with regard to meaning making was that almost all the groups received the messages differently. All the respondents, except the university students constructed meanings in a manner that denies the “preferred meaning” which is conveyed (encoded) by the producers.

Regardless of gender, the majority of educated working respondents and educated family members decoded only parts of the message as intended. They negotiated messages of such nature according to what they think is an appropriate way of construction.

As to the university students, it is the only group which explored to receive the messages as intended. The messages are also found to be much more appealing to this group.

On the contrary, the majority of housewives and lower educated family members rejected the advertisement messages. They appeared to show little or no interest in the ads, and for some of them, the commercials appeared to be very difficult to comprehend.

Below are some of the meanings constructed by the respondents from the different groups;

FGD 3 (E):“I watch such commercials every time with great interest. Clearly, the message is that we need to drink beer because it is the carrier of passion and enjoyment, which is so true. This commercial is very realistic, you know why? Beer brings pleasure and fun when it is especially taken with the beautiful ladies dancing in the commercials. You know, the moment I see beer ads of such nature, even if I am absorbed in my study I would be tempted to get to that mood.”

(B):“The meanings of these commercials are very similar. That is that drinking beer gives equality to women to do everything what they like. For me beer is a means to disassociate myself from the environment and wedge my freedom. So the message is very real, clear and understandable. In our society women are allowed to act freely in the bars or when they take drinks.”

FGD 2 (B): “I have absolutely no problem with the information I get from these commercials. However I have some reservations to the ways the messages are conveyed. For instance, ‘Pasta’ is one food type which is affordable and being commonly consumed in common Ethiopian households; however the images and variables used to promote this product are quite exaggerated. As we have just seen, the producers use lap-tops, I-Pods and very luxurious kitchens to persuade the people. But for me, it means that to eat pasta you need to have such materials and acquire such status. Besides, we Ethiopians are famous for having many ceremonies that is manifested by food and drinks. This as to me would be highly appealing to wider audience.

FGD 6 (A):“When I set my foot in the house at night my first job is to grab the remote control, and then the moment ads that promote western values appear on the TV I immediately switch it off. This is because they all promote risky behaviors that would spoil children and the youth. For instance, for the ad we just seen about ‘fruit juice’; children are the main target audiences. But, they are promoting sex and erotic acts to children. I totally, see no link between the message and the product, rather than driving under aged kids to risks.

The meanings constructed by the respondents revealed that the commercials are open to myriads of interpretations which relates to Fiske’s concept of polysemy.Fiske (1986)

acknowledges polysemy, arguing an 'excess' of potential meanings exist within any media text. Fiske explained that whether it is a music video, an advertisement, a TV news bulletin or a feature film, the media text is made up of a variety of images and words from which can be chosen a range of images (cited in Williams, 2003:197).

Apparently, the majority of university students received the messages in a manner close to the one intended by the producers. They were also so much absorbed in the commercials when they were shown to the discussion group. They say that the ads are very interesting and appeal to their feelings. They also point out that such ads promote modernization and help them to update themselves.

This dominant view is illustrated by one of the students;

FGD 3 (E):“Our society is bound by lots of out-dated cultures and so does our only TV channel. On the TV, every time they portray these values and norms which almost does no good to the youth. So, we try to catch up with the rest of the world by watching western films, and commercials of such content.”

Thus, it was found out that unlike their indigenous culture, the students perceive western values as a symbol of modernization and in a self-relevant ways. In a similar manner, during the discussion the researcher has come across one important finding, when some of the discussants appeared to be students coming from the rural areas. They said that they came from quite different social context, whereby; western values are either new to them or are perceived as a curse. However, these students were equally interested and found to be very much receptive to western values. They underscored that although they are new to these values, they are very much influenced by the life styles of their class and campus mates. As one of the students put it, “in the campus students from the city are perceived as modern and civilized. So, everybody thrives to follow in their foot steps in every aspect of life.”

Moreover, another interesting point was revealed while the researcher held the discussion with a boy from a lower educated family. It was found out that the 13 years old boy reads commercials that promote technology as best ways of introducing new technology

to his parents . He says that his father is a merchant and he had little awareness about new technologies. As he shares one of his experiences: “I benefit from commercials that promote technologies for it is through this commercials that I show my dad what they are and convince him to buy for me as he did when it came to my I-pod .”

On the other hand, most of the highly educated working male and female discussants did not receive the whole messages as encoded by the producers. They adapted the messages in order to fit their life context. In the process, they appeared to be receptive to surface information about the basics of the products. Or else, they criticized the messages for being too narrow and unrepresentative of the entire target audience.

According to one of the female respondent;

FGD 2 (F):“I agree with the basics of the messages. Yes, it is true that beers are sources of pleasure and fun. However, we do not always need to adapt ourselves to western dancing and dressing styles in order to drink beer. How could elderly people who drink beer attach themselves to images of such nature?”

On the contrary, in two groups the researcher arrived at a result that totally contradicts with what found out with university students. The majority of the housewives and parents of lower education family members rejected the messages. Especially, for +40 housewives, it was found out that the messages were meaningless and very much out of context. Because, they failed to attach themselves to the messages they perceive it as “irrelevant and uninteresting” which in turn made them to develop negative views of some of the values manifested in the ads.

4.7. Major Factors Influencing Consumer’s Reception of Commercials

One of the primary objectives of this study is to explore factors that impact the target audience’s meaning making process. The aftermath of the “all- powerful” media paradigm reinforce researchers to focus on audience and their ability to influence media messages. Particularly, cultural theorists tried to underscore the existence and the power of different external factors that influence the consumer’s behavior in the construction of meaning out of commercial messages.

In cognizant, this section tried to explore the major factors that impacted the meaning making process in the previous section.

Generally, the majority of university students are highly receptive to western variables. Also, as they decoded the messages of such content they were found to be engaged and active participants. To meet the objective of this section, the researcher probed the discussants on why they decoded the messages in such a way. Then, they highly underscored that the influence of their friends, classmates and the campus life in general was very important.

As one of the respondents explains;

FGD 3 (B):“Though we are brought up in culture-conscious family that imposes every power on us, our life in the university and at home is quite different. Our colleagues are much more powerful than the media or our parents in influencing our thinking.”

Though it is difficult to conclude, it indicates that the power of peer groups is influential, no matter what the content of the discussion is. Mainly, commercials promoting western variables are consumed by students because they are taken as best means of constructing their life styles and also seen as an instrument to influence or impress their peers.

Age, education and family status also appeared to be influential in the meaning making process. Housewives and lower educated family members happened to reject the messages conveyed through western values and this is extremely reflected on elder housewives. They viewed such values as a threat to their religion, culture, traditional norms and their age communal life.

During the discussion, a 45 year old housewife expressed her attachment to her social context and her resentment to foreign values; “sometimes I feel like I committed a sin when I buy products promoted by women dressed abnormally and acted immorally. For me it is like giving recognition to spoil the society.”

This strong resentment of the audience with the content of the advertisement matches with the older Marxist notion of ideology. As Marx argued; “economic systems do not develop out of people’s beliefs and values but rather cultural values are determined by the nature of the economic structure.”(quoted in Williams, 2003: 95).

Most importantly, it was also revealed that there is a hugely visible lack of shared assumption between the producers and these group of the target audience particularly.

In consequence, the researcher posed the question; “why most advertising agencies rely on predominantly western values to promote their goods?” to the advertising agencies engaged in the study.

Almost sharing similar presuppositions, the ad agencies argued that western values are much more appealing and persuasive than the local values to a wide range of audiences. As one of the managers of the advertising agency states; “everyday we are homogenizing at the expense of the powerless local values regardless of gender, age, race, education...”

Thus, it seems that there is a tendency of taking the audience as passive recipient of whatever provided through the media. Also the producers seemed to fail to recognize the power of the social context in which the media message is received, at least to the lower educated family members and housewives, as this study indicates.

On the other hand, age and marital status were explored to influence the decoding process of educated working discussants of male and female. It was found that the young and unmarried respondents of both sexes viewed local values as “negative and backward”. This is probably because, they want to assert that they are different and better than the commoners and they believe that they are meant to bring ‘change’ to the society.

As one of the female respondents put it; “the reason why we earned our degree is, primarily, to attain our freedom of life and secondly, to enlighten and freed the society bounding norms.”

Actually, this notion of the respondent's rhymes with Fiske's "Pleasure and Resistance" thought. As stated in Croteau and Hoynes, (2003) John Fiske argues that the act of interpretative resistance produces pleasure. Fiske goes on to argue that the power and popularity of pop culture motivates the audience to assert their independence as the media allows the audience a kind of freedom to understand the world in their own terms.

Finally, though ethical considerations are not the main part of this study, they seem to matter as many of the respondents underscored it. Breaching of ethical laws and practicing the art without professional qualification made the respondents develop wrong attitudes towards the commercials as a whole. And this also influenced the audiences decoding behavior.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the main findings of the research which are analyzed under the four themes designed in order to meet the main objectives of the study. The results and findings are also collaborated with theoretical and methodological approaches. In comprehensive terms this chapter tells; the general view of the audience towards commercials, how they receive commercials of western and local elements, and also explains the main factors that influence the consumer's behavior with regard to meaning making. In the next chapter a further conclusion of the whole study will be given.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

In broad analysis, this paper gives an insight on what cultural role contemporary advertising plays in Ethiopia. It examined advertising in terms of what values are being promoted; and also find out how values influence the target audience's behavior in meaning making.

The qualitative approach chosen to undertake research on audience reception in this study is believed to shed light on how the audience experience television 'food and drinks' advertising.

Primarily, this study revealed the ability of readers to construct/actualize the meanings they want out of the media messages. As it was found out; even respondents from similar social groups appeared to associate different sense towards similar messages.

The qualitatively content analyzed samples primarily revealed that anecdotal difference in advertising strategies is not a myth. It clearly demonstrates that different values (local/western) are used to promote 'food and drink' commercials.

However, though food commercials are culture bound, it appeared that advertising agencies predominantly rely on western variables to advertise products.

Referring to the audience's consumption behavior, this research concluded that except for the housewives, almost all of the other respondents, use commercials for various purposes. Though the housewives use the message to get information about products, they also appeared to be selective in relation to the content. They only take for granted messages that reflect their life experience.

Apparently, educated working respondents of both sexes put the issue of ethics and lack of professionalism on the fore as to why they read the commercials for different reason.

As to university students they mainly watch commercials to update themselves of western life style and to “modernize” themselves, as they put it.

Marital status and education revealed to matter most with regard to reception of western values by the housewives and lower educated family members. It was found out that they rejected the messages; as they show no interest, and for some of them (relatively elder ones) it was found to be hard to even understand the messages. However, the majority of respondents from both groups appeared to be so much absorbed in enthusiastic to react to commercials promoting local variables. It was found out that the married and elderly respondents are so keen about their religion, norms and communal lives. However it also important recognizes that fewer respondents from both groups revealed to be less interested to such messages. As it later emerged that their social class and lived experience quite different from their counterparts.

Most importantly, and this is the point where the advertising agencies lost their track, according to the finding of the study. The agencies seem to ignore the influence of social context in advertising processing. They pay scant attention to the relationship between the content of ads and the social context in which they are likely to be consumed. However, it finds that social context to be much more powerful than the media messages.

On the contrary, for young students western values appeared to be so very appealing and influential. Regardless of their background, age and sex, they processed the messages more or less as encoded by the producers. The students perceived local values as ‘outdated and meaningless’; showing no interest as they rejected the messages. Mainly, they expressed that the power of their peers especially in the campus is very immense in relation to changing their behavior and life style.

Western values are criticized for being narrow and unrepresentative of the potential audience watching ETV by highly educated working respondents of both sexes. They tend to negotiate and adapt the messages to their needs and interest.

On the other hand, age emerged to bring a difference when it comes to local values.

The majority of younger working males and younger females focused on pointing out the 'negative values' embedded in local cultures and their consequences. But, elder educated working respondents tend to accept and understand the messages as intended, regardless of sex.

On the other hand, though standardized advertising approach contends that advertising messages are decoded similarly regardless of local context, the study came up with a contrasting result. In the study it appeared that the decoding process is subjected to severe distortions, as the receivers decoding process is shaped and influenced by different external factors.

In general the study revealed that ad messages are open to various interpretations. Regarding the audience, it finds that there are many external factors that would impact the audiences meaning making matter. Importantly, it emerged that it is not appropriate to view audiences as mass-audiences; as they are defined based on different scenarios which are relevant, mainly to their social context. Besides, as the housewives and lower educated family members seemed to react selectively to the messages, it comes to make the influence of education less in making audiences active in reading media messages.

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Appendix I

The respondents who participated in the study

Between the age of 25 and 50

FGD (1) Working males with high level of education

'A' is a 27 years old male with MA in educational psychology, working in an NGO.

'B' is a 30 years old male with BA in History, a high school teacher.

'C' is a 32 years old male with BA in foreign language and literature, working in government office.

'D' is a 50 years old male with MA in TEFL, lecturer.

'E' is a 44 years old male with BA in Sociology working in NGO.

'F' is a 39 years old male with college diploma working in private business.

Between the age of 25 and 50

FGD (2) Working females with high level of education

'A' is a 50 years old female with college Diploma, a Junior high school teacher.

'B' is a 38 years old female MA in Anthropology, working in NGO.

'C' is a 30 years old female with BA in Linguistics, working in private company.

'D' is a 31 years old female with college Diploma in Accounting, working in government office.

'E' is a 37 years old female with MA in Gender Studies, working in private company.

'F' is a 41 years old female with BA in Sociology, working in government office.

FGD (3) Addis Ababa University under graduate students

'A' is a 19 years old female student majoring in civil engineering.

'B' is a 22 years old female student majoring in law.

'C' is a 20 years old female student majoring in philosophy.

'D' is a 20 years old male student majoring in linguistics.

'E' is a 23 years old male student majoring in psychology.

'F' is a 22 years old male student majoring in sociology.

FGD (4) between the age of 35 and 55

Housewives

'A' is a 36 years old female who is a 11th grade drop out and has two children.

'B' is a 45 years old female who attained only informal education.

'C' is a 48 years old female who quit from grade four and has four children.

'D' is a 51 years old female who has no formal education and has seven children.

'E' is a 55 years old female who has completed high school and has three children.

'F' is a 42 years old female who quit from grade seven and has three children.

FGD (5) Members of a family with high level of education

'A' is 38 years old mother with BA in Natural Science and has two children, working in government office.

'B' is 45 years old father with MA in Pharmacy, working in private company.

'C' is a 12 years old daughter

'D' is a 9 years old son.

'E' is a 33 years old female with a BA in computer, working in private company

FGD (6) Members of a family with low level of education

'A' is a 57 years old father who quit from 4th grade and a businessman.

'B' is a 46 years old mother with no formal education

'C' is a 27 years old daughter who has completed junior school.

'D' is a 25 years old son who has completed grade 8

'E' is a 13 years old son who is a 5th grade student.

'F' is a 30 years old female family member who has quit from grade 9.

'G' is a 28 years female family member who has completed high school.

Appendix II

Thematic questions for focus group interviews

Part one: biographical information

1. name/ code -----
2. age -----
3. gender-----
4. level of education-----
5. place of residence-----

Part two: General awareness about commercials.

1. What do you understand by commercials?
2. Why are they made for? (Do they have advantage as a source of information?)
3. Why do you watch commercials?
4. To whom do you think the commercials are made for? Why?

Part three: attitudes towards commercials.

1. Which commercials are easy to understand? Why?
2. Which commercials are difficult to understand? Why?
3. What do you like most from the commercials? Why?

Part four: commercials and sense making

1. Do these commercial have a message?
2. What do you understand from the messages of the commercials?
3. Do you think these commercials are appealing? Why? Why not?
4. In your opinion, do you think these commercials are appealing to your exiting life experience? (If yes how? If no why?)

Part five: commercials and culture

1. How do you define culture?
2. What are the most common and important Ethiopian cultural values?
3. Do you think using cultural values in commercials to appeal to the target audience is important? Why? Why not?
4. What are the most common Ethiopian cultural variables used in these commercials?
5. What do you understand from the messages these selected commercials?
6. In your opinion, do you think these commercials are appealing to your exiting life experience? (If yes how? If no why?)
7. What do you say about the impact of such commercials to the society?

Part six: commercials and western variables

1. What do you understand by western values?
2. What western values have you observed from these commercials?
3. How do you understand the messages?
4. Do you think commercials containing such variables are easy to understand? Why? Why not?
5. In your opinion, do you think these commercials are appealing to your exiting life experience? (If yes how? If no why?)
6. What do you say about the impact of such commercials to the society?

Part seven: audience's impression about commercials

1. What strengths do you see in the commercials?
2. What weaknesses do you see in the commercials?

Interview guide for depth interview with advertising agency managers

1. How long have you been in commercial?
2. Do you think the food and drink commercials your agency produces appealing? Why? Why not?
3. How do you select your target audience?
4. What factors do you foresee when you make commercial messages?
5. Do you think food and drink commercial messages reach the target audience as intended? Why? Why not?
6. What is your implication on the relationship between culture and commercials?
7. Do you use local cultural elements in the commercials you produce? If yes why? If not why not?
8. Which western values do you use mostly? Why?
9. In your opinion which approach do you think is the best to make the audience perceive the messages as intended? (traditional, western or combination)
10. What is your general implication about the advertising industry and the society?