

**Consuming the Commercial Break:
An Ethnographic Study of the Potential
Audiences for Television Advertising**

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**STOCKHOLM SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS**
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To Greta and Fabian



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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Understanding how viewers watch TV is something of a Holy Grail for advertisers. TV ratings may tell you how many people watched a show but Barb¹ counts a viewer as someone who is in the room with the TV on. That viewer may not be paying attention to the program let alone the adverts.”

Financial Times, November 13, 2001

“An independent firm (such as Nielsen, in America) estimates how many television sets are tuned to a given channel at a given time. Advertisers then pay a rate ... for the right to expose the implied audience to their spot. ... The problem is obvious. The television room may be empty. Its owners may have gone to make a cup of tea or to the toilet. They may have switched channels during the commercial break, be napping or talking to the phone.”

The Economist, July 8, 2006

Picture yourself at home in front of the television. A commercial break comes on. What do you do; do you watch the ads? Do you immediately grab the remote control in order to check what is happening on the other channels? Do you talk to your spouse? Do you leave the room for a welcome toilet break? Or do you go to the kitchen to put the kettle on? Do you behave in the same way during all commercial breaks, or does your behavior change depending on what program you are watching,

¹ The Broadcasters' Audience Research Board. An organization responsible of providing estimates of the number of people watching television in the UK.

who you are watching a program together with, and when you are watching television?

The commercial break does not exist in splendid isolation from the surrounding setting. Like any other consumption activity, the consumption of the commercial break is embedded in a content-rich environment. In order to gain an understanding of a particular consumption phenomenon it is imperative to take into consideration the contexts that the phenomenon is immersed in. Consumers encounter advertising messages in countless settings and forms. The vehicles used to deliver advertising messages differ and advertising consumption differs with them. For example, some media are more likely than others to be consumed in private and media therefore vary in the extent to which contextual variables of a social nature are likely to play a significant role in how consumers experience advertising. In addition, viewing environments can vary widely even within the same media. Consuming a television advertising at home is different from consuming it in a bar or airport. Conversely, other media (e.g., radio) may be consumed at home in circumstances not dissimilar from those in which consumers may experience television advertising.

Television advertising enters the home in the form of interruption of the chosen viewing experience (Mick et al. 2004). The obtrusiveness of the commercial break has consequences on what the viewers will do when confronted with it. Moreover, television advertising enters 'the home', a nest of complex dynamics that exists in a social context, a time context, as well as an 'everyday' context. This means that an advertisement has to struggle for attention with all other aspects of lived life within the setting of a household. As a consequence, the behaviors of the potential audiences for television advertising can differ depending on when, where and with whom the potential advertising encounters take place.

TV viewing is often a social activity. Barwise and Ehrenberg (1994) show that among people that do not live alone, about fifty percent of the day-time viewing takes place in company with at least one other household member, and after work, in the evening, almost all viewing takes place in company of others. Television therefore takes on an

important role in the politics of the family (Morley 1986). Moreover, much of the talk and gossip in everyday life can be traced back to television as the source of origin (Hobson, 1982). Somewhat surprisingly considering the sociality of TV viewing, advertising research has traditionally studied the solitary subject (Buttle, 1991; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Ritson and Elliot, 1999). The stronghold of methodological individualism as an investigatory approach within social sciences, particularly within psychology (e.g., Su et al. 1999), has led to a lopsided amount of research on the relationship between advertising and a viewer (Mick 1992). Advertising researchers' overriding focus on individual information processing is another reason for the decontextualization of advertising research (McCracken 1987; Scott 1994).

Assumptions about managers' inability to control environmental variables such as social context are another factor behind such a focus on individual response to advertising messages (Ritson and Elliot 1999). What are being tested in advertising experiments are those variables that are generally considered within the realm of control of copywriters and media planners. Examples are type of appeal and program context. The role of social context is considered by researchers a variable that is outside the domain of control and is therefore typically ignored. Needless to say, the endogenous variables are of great importance, and advertising research has overlooked other significant contributions to advertising effects by not exploring the influence of factors "outside the black box" (McCracken 1990, p.3). Such influences derive from variables like cultural, social, spatial, and temporal contexts that comprise advertising consumption environments. As a consequence, most advertising research takes place in laboratory settings where not only the consumer is assumed to be a lonely viewer, but she is also studied in an environment where spatial and temporal contexts are absent (Buttle 1991; Mick and Buhl 1992; Ritson and Elliot 1999). Such contexts need to be acknowledged in order to better understand the behavior of potential audiences for advertising because "patterns of media consumption, especially television viewing, are generated and sustained within... social, spatial and temporal relations" (Silverstone, 1994, p.33).

Drawing from relativistic philosophies of science and inspired by new paradigms arising in other social science disciplines, a group of consumer researchers began in

the mid 1980's to form an interpretive stance within the field of consumer research (Brown 1995). With the emergence of this interpretive consumer research paradigm, methods such as ethnography and textual analysis were introduced to the field of consumer research, and with them came a renewed interest in different consumption phenomena. Starting from the 1990s there has been a surge in the number of ethnographic accounts of consumption practices. Examples of such works are studies on seasonal consumption habits, as in the case of Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), brand loyalty, as in the work of Olsen (1995), consumption sites, as in the case of Penalosa (2001), and on subcultures of consumption, as in the work of Kozinets (2001). Despite the rapid development of the interpretive consumer research paradigm, very little interpretive research has explored any aspect of advertising. Among the few attempts within interpretive consumer research to explore advertising there has been an inclination to avoid empirical audience research in favor of textual analysis of advertisements, as in the works of Scott (1994b) or Stern (1989; 1996), or of an analysis of the general role of advertising from a cultural perspective, as in McCracken (1986). The few scholars who have conducted empirical audience research have focused on the social uses of advertising in everyday life, as in the works of O'Donohoe (1994) and Ritson and Elliot (1999), rather than on the audience at the time of potential reception of advertising.

With the emergence of cultural studies, and the founding of the influential Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Studies (CCCS) came a research focus on the interpretation of popular cultural media and the subsequent influence that media has on contemporary society. Scholars directly linked or influenced by that CCCS, such as Morley and Willis, were influential in bringing about this focus on the interpretation of popular cultural media (e.g., Morley 1986; Willis 1990). Reception research conducted within cultural studies aims to gain an understanding of the interpretation of meanings of mass media within the social context where the act of interpretation occurs (Fiske 1992). This ethnographic turn in reception research represents a direct attempt to re-contextualize the receiver of mediated messages:

If a central aim of reception ethnography is to understand the lived experiences of media consumers...then it has to engage with the situational contexts in which media are used and interpreted.

(Moore 1993, p.32)

Potential audiences for advertising have not received any specific empirical attention within the field of cultural studies. Studies with a specific focus on advertising rather take on the form of a general commentary on the nature of advertising, as in the case of Williams (1975), or the form of an ideological deconstruction of advertisements, as in the case of Williamson (1978). However, the methods used and the theoretical advances made in the area of cultural studies concerning other types of mass media consumption can provide fruitful insights to an investigation into the consumption of the commercial break. In order to understand the complexities of any kind of media reception it is imperative to explore the “everyday micro-settings” which holds a complex web of routines and relations (Moore, 1993). In the case of television advertising reception, the contexts in which the potential audiences for television advertising are found needs to be investigated if a more complex understanding of advertising reception is to be attained.

Research Problem and Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the everyday encounters with the commercial break within a naturalistic setting. An ethnographic method will be used in order to pursue a naturalistic inquiry into the matter. In order to capture the actual behavior it is necessary to observe people in an uncontrolled environment, namely in the natural habitat of the informants. Groups of people, families and other co-habitation constellations, are observed and their behaviors analyzed both at household and individual level. The purpose is to investigate how people behave when the ads come on. Thematic findings regarding the consumption of the commercial break will emerge.

Intended Contribution

The study will contribute to theories of advertising consumption; more specifically it will contribute to a more ecologically valid understanding of the consumption of the commercial break, in which the potential advertising reception is taking place. It will shed light on the context in which the television advertising viewing behavior is embedded. At present there is a need for a complementing perspective to the existing body of research within advertising research and reception research within cultural studies in order to provide a fuller understanding of the phenomenon. Consumer research offers us the solitary subject's reception of advertising, and the textual relationship between an ad and a consumer, but not the social context or a method for studying actual viewing. Reception research offers us the method to study, and an insight to, everyday media consumption, but does not contribute to the particular understanding of advertising reception.

Clarification

In this study *behavior* is limited to what can be observed by a film camera. Behavior is as a consequence defined as what people are doing and saying. Behavioral components that can be recorded as present or absent by a camera are actions, utterances (both in the presence of others and alone), body posture, social interaction, and physical contact between people. Attention needs to be paid by the researcher to what is happening but also to what is not happening. In other words, to fully understand a behavior it is essential not only to note its occurrence, but also to check for the absence of a particular behavioral component.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis contains a literature review that will form the basis for the empirical research. The general purpose is to review the theoretical issues which surround the consumption of the commercial break. It begins with a discussion of the dominant paradigm within advertising research. This is followed by a discussion of what is missing as a result. Within this discussion, topics such as the obtrusiveness of the commercial break, temporal aspects, the context of the home and the everyday, and the social context are highlighted. This discussion will be followed by a section on the context-sensitive exceptions of advertising research, and by one on the re-contextualization of the potential audiences of television advertising.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion on methodology. The chapter describes the interpretive paradigm within consumer research. Among the topics discussed are the use of naturalistic settings and of purposive sampling, the concept of emergent design, and also the methods used within the interpretive paradigm. In this chapter the ethnographic method is also investigated.

Chapter 4 contains a description of the study. The study is an ethnography in which data has been gathered through the means of filming and interviewing the informants of 8 households. In this chapter the data collection procedures are discussed. Moreover, a section stresses the centrality of television viewing within the context of a household. This is followed by a discussion on the approach to observation used in this thesis and by a description of the filming and of the verbal reports. Finally, the chapter presents an account of how the understanding of the consumption of the commercial break was reached, the process from data collection to *Verstehen*.

Chapter 5 contains the empirical findings. By re-contextualizing the ‘receiver’ of commercial messages from the asocial vacuum to the social world of everyday an understanding of the lived experiences of the potential audiences for television advertising is gained. Chapter 5 has an audience-centered rather than an advertising-centered focus on the phenomenon of the consumption of the commercial break. The

cultural behaviors are illustrated with archetypical episodes that exemplify different categories of behavior occurring during the course of a commercial break. The cultural behaviors that occur during the consumption of the commercial break are Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction, Tasking, Reading, Zapping and Advertising Watching.

Chapter 6 qualifies the taxonomy of the cultural behaviors explored in Chapter 5 by acknowledging a set of contingencies. Moreover, it attempts to move away from the static and compartmentalized snapshot descriptions of the cultural behaviors by acknowledging how cultural behaviors blend into each other. It also rejects the dichotomy of viewing versus non-viewing of television advertisements. Moreover, Chapter 6 takes a macro-perspective on what makes up the meaning of the commercial break, essential for the understanding of how viewers approach the phenomenon of consumption of the commercial break.

Finally, Chapter 7 highlights the key findings of this research, relates them to existing literature, and identifies how they improve our understanding of advertising consumption. Avenues for future research are also discussed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Despite of the sociality of TV viewing, advertising researchers have traditionally studied the solitary subject (i.e., the lonely viewer) (Buttle 1991; Mick and Buhl 1992). The study of the social uses of advertising has been limited, and the reception of advertising in a naturalistic setting has practically been ignored (O'Donohoe 1994; Ritson and Elliot 1999). This also means that contextual factors of time, space, life world and everyday life have been not taken into consideration. Moreover, the difference between watching something that one has chosen to watch and the often involuntary exposure to advertising has not been properly addressed (Mick et al. 2004). In fact, Mick et al. (1999) comment that one of the fundamental gaps in the theorizing of advertising processing is the lack of insight into the situational factors that can moderate advertising reception.

In this chapter the dominance of experimental research within advertising research will be discussed. Furthermore it will be highlighted what is missing from our understanding of the potential audiences for television advertising as a result of this paradigmatic focus; in a natural setting what kind of contextual factors is the reception of television advertising immersed in? We will then move on to acknowledge the exceptions to this a-contextual view of advertising reception, and look to the discipline of cultural studies in order to gain insights into the nature of television viewing.

Dominant Paradigm of Advertising Research

The dominance of the logical empiricist paradigm within the field of consumer research has resulted in many experimental studies (Ozanne and Hudson 1989). As a result, the vast majority of advertising research has used an approach in which subjects' reactions to a particular independent variable are recorded. This kind of experimental advertising research puts forward audiences as reactive agents with a limited number of alternative actions (Mick 1992). Advertising research traditionally conceptualized ad comprehension as "the grasping or extracting of prespecifiable meanings from the message" (Ibid 1992, p. 411). In a typical advertising study, the researcher would carefully construct a number of advertising stimuli according to a certain experimental design, display the ads to a sample of individuals and then, after collecting the responses, test a certain number of theory-driven hypotheses. The implicit assumption behind the advertising as information approach is that social context is an exogenous factor that does not interact with the treatment variables. This means that the context of advertising reception has been reduced to an individualistic and solitary one and as a result the influence of environmental and social factors has been ignored. McCracken (1990, p.3) notes that culture has generally been treated as a "black box" within the models of advertising reception. Similarly, Holbrook (1995, p.93) agrees:

...The typical psychological treatment [of consumer research] does relatively little to place brand preferences into the social context that includes ongoing interpersonal activities and shared symbolic meanings.

(Holbrook 1995, p.93)

Consumer research does to a certain extent share this under-investigation of the effect of social context with psychology. The methodological individualism that characterizes much of psychology has been the focus of an active debate within the

discipline (Su et al. 2001). Even social psychologists usually conceptualize social behavior in individual terms, and are as a consequence limited in their ability to conceptualize and measure group phenomena (Fiske and Goodwin 1994; Levine and Moreland 1998). As a result, “psychology ordinarily deals with individual processes and structures, without much systematic consideration of social context” (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, p. 627).

The context of the experiment is bound to have an affect on the observed behavior (Peter 1991). Despite this, the vast majority of studies within advertising research are performed in experimental settings in which the context of advertising reception is held constant or just ignored. As Danaher comments: “advertising recall studies are typically laboratory situations where respondents are exposed to an ad they have never seen before... studies which ask respondents to recall their typical behavior during ad breaks produce results that might be shaped by societal opinion on advertising” (1995, p. 37). Even the same ad may elicit different affective reactions when viewed in a naturalistic setting instead of in an experimental setting (Lutz 1985). The experimental setting is still a context, but a context that is different from that where the behavior intended to study naturally takes place. Richins (1991) is an example of how experimental research sometimes not only holds the contextual factors constant, but ignores the effect that the social context might have on the subjects. The experiments carried out by Richins (1991) were aimed at understanding whether exposure to ads containing attractive female models affects subjects’ rating of their own physical attractiveness and their comparison standard (as measured by their evaluation of a number of photos of “normal-looking” females). In the study subjects were run in groups ranging from 1 to 9 individuals. In other words, some subjects were alone when evaluating the ads whereas others were in company of other subjects, but this contextual difference was not accounted for.

In advertising research according to the main paradigm, the consumer of advertising exists in a social vacuum in which their perceptions, actions, and evaluations centre on the self (Solomon 1983; Thomas 1992). The consumer is at different turns emotional, uninterested, engaged, even empowered, but he or she is also alone. McCracken (1987, p. 122), comments on how separating the individual from her cultural context limits our understanding of the supra-individual nature of meaning:

The absence of this specification means that the really important part of the model is all of the stuff that takes place within the individual's head. But the model gives no way of including in this heat all of the collective meanings and conventions on which it draws and on which it operates. The effect of context and the profoundly collective nature of meaning is largely left out of account. For this paradigm the individual does not live in a culturally constituted world.

(McCracken 1987, p. 122)

The consumer receives and processes the advertising message individually. When advertisements are seen as interactive that interactivity is confined solely to the individual's response to the ad and to the product featured in the ad (Stern 1994). The reception of advertising messages occurs in an asocial context with the consumer constrained to interact with the medium itself rather than with other members of the advertising audience. By decontextualising advertising reception experimental consumer researchers have taken the consumer from one type of context, the naturalistic experience of everyday, into another context, the laboratory setting. Advertising meaning will change in this context (Grafton-Small and Lindstead 1989), and so will the actions of reception.

However, the term context is not totally ignored within the experimental streams of advertising research. The type of context usually acknowledged within advertising research is program context, also called media context. This type of context refers to the programming and advertising that surround an ad. The words of Aylesworth & McKenzie (1998) might serve as an example of how the context is usually defined:

Prior research has shown that the context in which a commercial message is presented can have important effects on how the message is processed and its success in the marketplace... How characteristics of

the programming or editorial environment influence the effectiveness of advertising is a question of widespread interest to the field of marketing. It is important to advertising and marketing practitioners because of its implications for media selection decisions, and it is important to academic researchers not only for that reason, but also because contextual factors have increasingly been recognized as key moderators of the impact of persuasive communications on message recipients.

(Aylesworth & MacKenzie 1998, p. 17)

Research in the area of the influence of program context on advertising processing has looked at a variety of phenomena, such as channel flicking (e.g., Heeter and Greenberg 1985; Siddarth and Chattopadhyay 1998; Yorke and Kitchen 1985; Zufryden, Pedrick, and Sankaralingam 1993); program involvement (e.g., Lord and Burnkrant 1993; Park and Young 1986; Tavassoli, Shultz and Fitzimons 1995); program-induced mood (e.g., Aylesworth and McKenzie 1998; Kamins, Marks and Skinner 1991; Pavelchak, Antil and Munch 1988); and program liking (e.g., Murry, Lastovicka and Sing 1992) and this stream of advertising research continues to treat audiences for advertising as “islands of cognitive and affective responses unconnected to the social world, detached from culture” (Buttle 1991, p. 108). It is not surprising however, that the program context has been acknowledged and researched, when other contextual factors have been left aside. Given the heritage of the information-processing paradigm, it is natural to stay within the medium itself and focus on the response of a person passively being exposed to something on the screen. In this view, viewers are influenced by context, but only the context in which a particular advertisement is set. The lonely viewer is influenced by moods, but these moods are derived from asocial environmental contexts such the advertising pod or the surrounding programming. From this psychological perspective, other contextual influences are seen as experimental limitations rather than central fundamentals of the reception of television advertising. Silverstone argues that the experimental research “...of necessity, constructed the relations between media and response as one to be explained in psychological terms” (1994, p.144). Furthermore, as pointed out by Aylesworth and McKenzie (1998), program context is a variable under the control of the marketer or researcher. The program context as such offers important insights to a

viewer's potential reactions to the interplay between programs and advertisements, and to the interaction between different advertisements in an advertising pod. However, it does not provide us with a sufficient picture of what will happen when a viewer is watching television alone as opposed to being together with other people in a naturally occurring viewing context.

In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the potential audiences for television advertising, we have to further contextualize the possible encounters with television advertising and move beyond the focus of program context. For most people advertising represents an obtrusive and unsolicited form of communication that reaches the viewer in the form of an interruption of the chosen viewing experience (Mick et al. 2004). Potential audiences for television advertising are not found in a void drained from life in general; rather they exist in a highly contextual environment.

What is Missing as a Result?

By ignoring context, we have ignored a number of “exogenous” variables that are crucial to our understanding of the potential audiences for television advertising. Such audiences can be found in public spaces (e.g., sports bars and at airports), but more often they are found in the privacy of households. Lived life is inescapably spatial and temporal. Actions and activities are undertaken at a situation defined by a locus in time and space. The situation is a source of influence on behavior, as are the person and the stimulus object (Belk 1975). This means that the behavior of audiences for television advertising might differ depending on when, where, and with whom, the potential encounters with an advertisement takes place. The culture that surrounds us is essential in how we make sense of objects and activities in our life (McCracken 1986). The utilization of meaning in interpreting reality is an ongoing process to make sense of the ins and outs of everyday life. This means that if you extract a behavior out from the context where it naturally occurs, you will take away essential parts of the sense making procedure of the consumers. The naturally occurring behavior of

audiences for television advertising is found in the environment of a household where many different contextual factors are affecting if the advertisements are watched or not. Not even if we add the program context to the picture will it provide a good enough proxy for the naturally occurring viewing situations. In relying on the information-processing paradigm other crucially important contexts, essential in understanding how a person will act in a certain viewing situation, are ignored. Which are the contextual factors that might affect the behavior of the potential audiences for television advertising? Below the unsolicited nature of the commercial break will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion on the temporal aspects of television viewing. Further there will be an exploration of the contexts of the home and everyday life that television advertising is immersed in. Also the social context that is framing the experience when more than one person is viewing television will be pondered upon.

The Obtrusive Nature of the Break

The commercial break is a built-in form of interruption within or between different programs on the commercial television channels (Mick et al. 2004). Most people turn on the television in order to watch the programs, and not the advertising. When watching alone, reading (i.e., viewing) the commercial break or a particular advertisement can be seen as a motivated act; people chose for a reason to watch or not to watch (Scott 1994). According to this view the viewer is not an unwitting recipient of television advertising. Instead the potential audiences for advertising are governed by different motivations which can lead to different outcomes in the media use. According to the uses and gratifications approach, individuals select media to accomplish some end (Andersen and Meyer 1988). The media content serves as a mean to reach the selected end.

The intrusive nature of the commercial break is not easy, or even sought after, to capture within an experimental setting. Participants are generally told to watch a televised segment of a certain length often featuring both programming and clutter/clutters of advertisements in order to account for the program context. The unsolicited nature of advertising is hardly acknowledged in this way, since ‘the

viewers' are highly motivated to direct their attention to the screen. A shortcoming of traditional advertising research is that it has suffered from a considerable bias in the formulation of the audience; viewers are often being seen as if "searching for product information, compliantly forming positive brand attitudes, and resolving intentions to purchase", when a more realistic formulation might be "television viewers who roll their eyes, sigh and go for a snack when the commercial comes on" (Scott 1990, p. 227). Scott claims that in order to understand a consumer's response to an advertisement "we need a way of reaching out into everyday life, where some texts are read differently than others, and where readers are skeptical and products are part of experience" (1994b, p. 462).

Within the meaning-based stream of advertising research, advertising has come to be seen as a source of symbolic meaning in its own right. Advertisements are regarded as cultural products in themselves that are consumed for themselves (McCracken 1986). McCracken identifies the viewer as the final author in the process of transfer of meaning and claims that advertising can be thought of as lexicon of cultural meanings, where the viewer is "kept informed of the present state and stock of cultural meanings that exist in consumer goods" (1986, p. 76). Rather than merely being seen as an indirect source of symbolic meaning, advertising can be conceived as "an omnipresent arena in which human reality is mediated (Mick and Buhl 1992, p. 317). Advertising meaning is within this perspective not thought of as being supplied as a pre-packaged reality; instead it comes "to our homes as raw material which we process and reprocess" (Buttle 1991, p. 10). Several interpretations might co-exist and be actualized differently by different audiences with different interpretive conventions and cultural backgrounds (Jensen 1995). The meaning-based models of advertising research acknowledge the impact that context has on the individual's search for meaning, but it still treats the consumer as a lonely viewer at the moment of reception where the notion of sociality is stipulated by culture, background, experiences and conventions and not by social interactions per se.

The Temporal Aspect of Television Viewing

Viewers watch commercial television during different times of the day. Sometimes a viewer turns on the television just in order to catch the news or the latest episode of their favorite sitcom. At other times, a viewer spends a whole night in front of the television. The viewing that takes place in the morning is different from that that takes place before dinner or just before going to bed. Since potential audiences for advertising are found in a context of time, it is important to take into account the temporal dimensions in investigating the phenomenon in question (Zwaga 1992). However, hardly any attention has been given to the potential effects of the context of time regarding the exposure to advertising within traditional advertising research. Instead, participants in a study participate at one specific time, and during a very limited duration of time:

“Ninety-four adult staff members at a West Coast university participated in an hour-long study...All subjects watched a half-hour local news show from a different state.”

(Cambell and Keller 2003, p. 295)

By ignoring temporal aspects of viewing, advertising research limits the understanding of the nature of behavior during commercial break. Whether time is measured by a clock or by measures of such as a lunar month or the season, the same events come around again and provide us with a sense of rhythm in life (Davies 1994). The body’s physiological processes go through rhythms:

Not just everything we do, but all our body’s physiological processes are *temporally organized and orchestrated*. We eat, sleep, breath, use energy, digest, perceive, think, concentrate, communicate, interact and work in a rhythmic way.

(Adam 1995, p. 46)

It is therefore likely that behaviors related to the potential audiences for advertising are affected by rhythms. The natural rhythms of the environment and the body are inseparable from the human being and from everyday social life (Adam 1995). The multitude of internal and environmental rhythms provides us with temporal frameworks that infuse every level of our existence. An example of environmental rhythms that affect us is the daily circle of daylight and darkness. Daylight and darkness serve like an organizing principle of our physiology, where a desynchronization from this cycle might even lead to a loss of health, as in the case of jet-lag (Fraser 1987). An example of internal rhythm is the cyclical pattern of individual arousal levels. In a rare exception within advertising research, Hornik (1988) found that consumer responses to advertising varied depending on time-of-day due to diurnal rhythms in individual arousal. Subjective conceptions of time focus on the cognitive and perceptual capabilities that individuals use to understand time (Hirschman 1987). The inescapability of the pervasiveness of time is a dimension of all social experience and practice (Munn 1992). This means that human action can be seen as an ongoing process of reproduction where people are reproducing themselves as temporal beings. There is a need at every level of social organization to standardize temporal references as to allow for a coordination of behavior, where time is a dimension that can be shared as an inter-subjective social reality (Zerubavel 1982). This means that social actors have a well developed commonsense knowledge of the temporal routines of daily life; they can recognize and understand social activities by taking into consideration when those social activities are taking place (Zerubavel 1981). The viewer can encounter commercial breaks at different times during the day, and this may have important consequences for consumer behavior. Moreover, television advertising enters the homes of the viewers. What does the household context mean? And how might it affect the potential viewers for television advertising?

Television Advertising Enters the Home and Everyday Life

Television advertising can be consumer in many different situations, such as in bars or airports. However, potential audiences for television advertising are most often found

in the context of the household. Meanings of the environment influence where people choose to interact and the behaviors they are most likely to engage in (Smith Lovin 1979). In traditional advertising research, participants are exposed to television in environments that hardly show any similarities with that of the household:

“They viewed sample of broadcasts in a theater setting.”

(Edell and Lane 1989, p. 152)

Consider the home: it is a physical environment in which people form a cultural environment through personalization as a way of both adapting it and creating order and significance (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). As such, the place where we live not only is providing a physical shelter, but is also a key milieu in the shaping and facilitating of our identities (Hill 1991). The potential audiences for advertising are found in a highly symbolic environment, where different norms for what is considered appropriate behavior apply:

The importance of the home derives from the fact that it provides a space for action and interaction in which one can develop, maintain, and change one’s identity. In its privacy, one can cultivate one’s goals without fear or ostracism or ridicule. The home is a shelter for those people and objects that define the self; thus it becomes, for most people, an indispensable symbolic environment.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, p. 144)

The way people are using a space involves a communicative value to the researcher interested in studying a particular phenomena that takes place in that environment (Baldassare 1979). In contemporary Western societies the home is considered to be a sacred place (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1987), where meanings are centered on concepts of safety and security, as well as privacy and sociality (Saunders 1981). A common concept of home is that of a warm, friendly and comfortable place that is catered for the needs of the inhabitants of the household (Madigan and Munro 1996).

Home fulfils many needs: a place of self expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guards.

(Cooper 1995, p. 4)

The home serves as the staging grounds for a vital bundle of activities, values, and undertakings (McCracken 1989b). These everyday activities and routines are in turn essential in creating the feeling of homeliness (Lewin 2001). Thus home does not come automatically through residency but through a process that takes time to complete (Deprés 1991).

The feeling of familiarity and routine people develop with regard to how things at home should be also contributes to their experience of feeling at home. Such temporal processes are matters of everyday activities that are coupled to the home and of a recurrent nature. It has been claimed that, with respect to feeling at home, certain dimensions can only be experienced through obvious routines.

(Lewin 2001, p.366)

Potential audiences for advertising are not to be found in a vacuum free from other influences of the experience of 'lived life'. Instead they bring into the potential exposure to advertising the larger picture. Given the nature of experimental research all these influences are considered to be exogenous:

“Each was randomly assigned to watch one of three tapes that varied only in amount of advertising clutter... Subjects were instructed to watch the program as they might watch any program.”

(Brown and Rothschild 1993, p. 140)

For instance there are many different reasons for choosing to consume media at a certain point. People may consume media in order to fulfill different personal needs and gratifications such as socialization, escape, entertainment, information, alleviation of boredom and relaxation (Hornik and Schlinger 1981; O'Guinn and Faber 1991). This motive behind watching might affect how the potential audiences for advertising react when the commercial break comes on:

If we ask people why they decided to watch television at some point in time, we might get a variety of answers, some mentioning particular programs, others suggesting the need to fill time e.g., 'I had nothing else to do.' The former illustrates consumption of media content; the latter illustrates consumption of a media situation.

(Hornik and Schlinger 1981, p. 344)

Moreover, television viewing does not take place in a vacuum from the bigger and the smaller elements of life. For example, the consumption of television can become a tool for the accomplishment of some other routine, and thus provide the improvisational space for the enactment (Anderson and Meyer 1988). Used in that way it can play an important part of the politics of a household (Morley 1986). For example, a person staring on the screen when watching together with others might during certain circumstances be a sign of an avoidance strategy rather than an expression of a profound interest in the particular program. Or a father might tell his child that bed time will occur after the end of a certain program. It is important to bear in mind that even though television viewing is a popular activity, it does not occur in isolation from the larger context of life. People engaging in watching television are not only viewers. It would be more accurate to depict them as human beings with dreams, hopes, obligations, and needs, who on a daily basis sit down on their sofas or armchairs and switch on the television set for a reason that might differ between different situations:

The same consumer traverses through a particular life history and resides in a current life-world that includes personal life themes and life projects.

(Mick and Buhl 1992, pp. 319-320)

People strive to structure their goals and means in order to achieve a sense of consistency in their life. Life themes are such existential concerns that a person deal with in his or her everyday life (Mick and Buhl 1992). Life projects, on the other hand, are ongoing enterprises in which a number of key concepts are selected and then enacted, refined and integrated as a part of life, and are as such subjected to changes by circumstances, preferences and stages in the life-cycle (McCracken 1987). Through life projects a person construct meanings of themselves and of the world (Ibid 1987). A person's current life-world, which includes life themes and life projects, is providing him or her with the horizon of expectations in which he or she encounters and makes sense of experiences (Mick and Buhl 1992). This means that a person engaged in a viewing activity brings his or her life-world into that activity; this means concerns about work, friends, family and life in general.

Moreover, TV viewing in the naturally occurring context of a household is merely one of many activities that a person can devote his or her limited amount of 'free time' to. There are for example physiological needs that imply that people need to spend at least some minimum of time sleeping and eating. Furthermore, there are other activities that demand a household member's attention and time:

...whereas industrial work involves the enduring repetition of the same task eight hours a day and five days a week, domestic work involves constant tensions among the rhythms specific to each activity. For example, not only are the timetables of cooking, washing, and cleaning of differing duration, but also their schedule can overlap. Furthermore, the performance of these tasks is routinely interrupted by the intrusion of other members of the household or persons from the outside world (e.g., neighbors, mailmen).

(Valadez and Clignet 1984, p. 816)

Social life within a household is embodied in habits and dispositions that enable people to generate an infinite number of practices adapted to changing situations (Jenkins 1994). Social behavior is constructed or improvised on the basis of such habits and dispositions. The actions and activities of a person are constrained by the social structure surrounding him or her, but not determined by it (Adler et al. 1987). The constraints put on behavior in a household setting might depend on the stage in the lifecycle, on the life-style and on the role of the household member in the household (Hendrix et al. 1979). For example, a parent with small children does have certain obligations and tasks to perform that a childless person of otherwise same circumstances does not have. Among the domestic activities to be performed by and divided among the members of the household are usually those activities related to food production, food consumption, housekeeping, and childrearing, and catering to personal needs (Junko 1979; Wilson 1989). The larger occupational context might also affect the microstructure of household behavior (Menaghan 1991). Work-related activities or worries might spill over to the “free time”. This means that different leisure activities do not only compete for time allocation with domestic activities, but also with work activities. The boundary between work, domestic work and leisure is blurred and different types of activities might intersect. It is not uncommon that people in a household setting undertake different activities seemingly simultaneously. In this way, by combining activities people utilize their time resources in order to accomplish several goals at the same time (Kaufman et al. 1991). Due to the interdependence among activities and the limited amount of time to allocate on different activities, if one is interested in understanding a certain consumption phenomena one has to take the broader picture into account to get a fuller understanding of the specific phenomena:

Such an elimination of secondary or parallel activity from the circle of observation naturally distorts in a rather arbitrary fashion the picture of what people do the day long and leads to a biased account of the account of the amounts of time they devote to the various task of life.

(Szalai 1972, p.2)

The potential audiences for television advertising within a household are thus immersed in a context full of everyday life matters and the larger life-world themes. This immersion should be acknowledged in the quest to understand the naturally occurring behavior during commercial breaks. Moreover, television viewing within a household context often takes on a social character. In households where more than one person lives, television viewing is likely to be a communal experience at times. What does the social context bring into the potential reception of television advertising?

The Commercial Break Framed by the Social Context

Fifty percent of daytime viewing, and almost all evening viewing, among people who are not living alone takes place in company of others (Barwise and Ehrenberg 1988). The naturally occurring potential audiences for advertising are embedded in a social context at the times when they might be exposed that an advertisement. In group situations, conversational processes have a great impact on the subsequent cognitive processes (Thomas 1992). Despite the often social nature of possible encounters with television advertising, traditional advertising research tends to study the individual behavior of the participants, and ignores the influences that the group has on the behavioral outcome. Moreover, participants are often exposed to advertising in solitude:

“Subjects were invited into the laboratory one at a time. Upon arriving, the subject was placed in a private room...”

(Janiszewski and Warlop 1993, p.176)

Within the field of consumer research there has been a growing body of literature in recent years that has investigated how consumption behaviors are influenced by social context. Examples are studies on embarrassment during purchase (Dahl, Manchomda and Argo 2001); on the effect on product attitudes of emotional contagion (Howard and Gengler 2001) and anticipation of group discussion (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999;

2002); on the impact of public consumption on variety seeking (Ratner and Khan 2002); and on sequential choice in group settings (Ariely and Levav 2000). In general interpretive and post-modern researchers have shown a greater concern to social context than quantitative and neo-positivist researchers (e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Hill and Stamey 1990, Kozinets 2001; O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Holt (1995; 1997) stressed the intrapersonal significance of consumption, pointing at the pervasiveness and implications of social contextual elements within the meaning and dynamics of consumption. For example, Holt (1995) proposed a taxonomy of consumption practices in which he distinguished between intra and interpersonal acts of consumption:

All acts of consuming are rife with such interpersonal interaction (even private acts of consuming involve self-communication and, often self-play), but this is particularly true of consuming that occurs in groups: families, peer groups, subcultures, organizations, and the like.

(Holt 1995, p. 15)

According to Anderson and Meyer (1988) it is important to acknowledge the difference between media use in its own right, and media use as an element in another type of routine; thus the act of "watching ads" should be regarded as a different activity from watching ads as a part of the act of an "evening with friends" or "after dinner socializing with your family". In advertising research, several authors have stressed the importance of considering the idiosyncratic nature of the meanings ascribed by a consumer to an advertising message (see, e.g., meaning-based models of advertising, McCracken [1987] and Mick and Buhl [1992]). Focusing on subjective ad comprehension (Mick 1992), several studies in consumer research acknowledge the "polysemic" status of advertising messages (e.g., Scott 1994), but fail to consider how the social context can shape and affect advertising interpretation.

Ritson and Elliot (1999) investigate teenagers' social uses of advertising within their peer-groups where the informants were interviewed and observed in a high school

setting. Ritson and Elliot found that advertising was employed as a useful tool in social interactions, indicating that consumers instrumentally use advertising messages in order to communicate specific ideas or to highlight group's structure and characteristics. Advertising has also been recognized as facilitator of general, interpersonal communication by supplying shared experiences which can then form the basis for conversation (Katz 1986). The phatic use of ads has been noticed in adolescent audiences (Ritson and Elliot 1999) where the adolescent viewer often use a particular ad to stimulate intra-family or intra-peer discourse.

Advertising serves as an easy topic of conversation that can be used when a person needs to keep the communication channels open. O'Donohoe (1994) studied young adults and their experience with advertising in their everyday lives in a focus group setting. O'Donohoe (1994) suggests that advertising is featured in family interactions as well as in peer interactions and provides an easy topic of conversation. Still, O'Donohoe argues that "talking about advertising is a social skill, and there are conventions and expectations regarding an individual's competence in its practice" (1994, p. 70). The central role of advertising as a form of "common culture" (Willis 1990) warrants its vital role in the initiation of social interaction. Advertising in different forms is repeatedly encountered by a large section of the population. Although these studies (O'Donohoe 1994; Ritson and Elliot 1999) shed important light on the social uses of advertising, their purpose was never to study the behavior of potential audiences for television advertising at the time of reception.

The Exceptions: Previous Context-Sensitive Advertising Research

There are different methods that can provide us with insight about the naturally occurring viewing behavior. For example, the use of data from people meters can give us some input on the potential audiences for advertising (e.g., Danaher 1995; Zufryden et al. 1993). A people meter consists of a device that monitors what the TV is doing and a remote control that monitors entries and exists of each member of a

household at times when the TV set is switched on (Danaher and Beed 1993). Each member of the household is asked to log in and out when entering and exiting the room if the TV is on (Danaher and Beed 1993). The information about the presence in the room is thus dependent on subject's self-reports. By using a people meter you track what programs the household is watching, and what if any channel surfing that is going on. Furthermore, if the members of the household remember to log on and off when entering and leaving the room we will also be provided with information on who is present at a certain programming segment. However, neither will it help us to understand the behaviors exhibited by the viewers during the commercial break comes on, nor will it show any of the ongoing social processes and interactions that take place during the potential encounters with television advertising.

Others have tried to shed light on what the behaviors of viewers in naturalistic settings at the time of reception through a post-reception inquiry. Pavelchak et al. (1988) investigated the effect on the emotions elicited by the Super Bowl on viewers in three cities. Further it was examined how these emotional reactions influenced recall for ads broadcasted during the game. The topic was researched by giving university students a questionnaire to fill out on the day after the game. The respondents were not told about the study before the questionnaire was distributed to avoid contaminating their viewing experience. The participants in the study were self-reporting on the proportion of the broadcasting that they had been following, how they felt before and after the game, and which advertisements that they recalled seeing within the frame of the Super Bowl programming. Moreover, the participants also accounted for the different activities that they had been engaged in during the game (e.g., talking and snacking). If our aim is to gain an understanding of a behavioral phenomenon, (e.g., consumption of television advertising), then to rely solely on post-reception data gathered from questionnaires, focus groups and interviews seems somewhat insufficient. If there are methods available that allow us to observe the phenomenon where it naturally occurs, then basing our understanding solely on the recapitulation of events seems inadequate or at best unsatisfactory.

In-home observations have the potency to provide typographies of advertising viewing behavior. Nevid and Cohen (1987) filmed subjects in their households in

order to record the subjects' behavior as they watched television. The subjects were given a videotape containing a movie and a pilot for a situation comedy that had advertising pods inserted to them as they would appear during normal viewing conditions. The subjects were instructed to watch television as they normally would do. The subjects were then called and asked questions about the advertisements an hour after they finished viewing the tape. Nevid and Cohen (1987) found that the recall of the commercial was low. Although providing us with valuable insights into the dismissal of television advertising as a focal point of a viewing experience, the study does not provide much help in our quest towards an understanding of naturally occurring behavior during the commercial break, since the program context was fixed, and the subjects only studied during the course of two programs. Moreover the subjects were specifically given a tape to watch, which is likely to have cued the participants into guessing what the aim behind the research was.

In a study on program and commercial viewing, Krugman et al. (1995) used in-home observations with the aim to test a number of hypotheses concerning the factors affecting visual attention to the television screen. Krugman et al. (1995) found that the avoidance norm regarding avoiding commercials can be divided into psychological avoidance - leaving the room- and mechanical avoidance- changing channels. Further, Krugman et al. (1995) found that attention to program positively influences attention to commercials, but that both program and commercial viewing take place among other activities (generically referred to as chores, reading, and engaging in "hobbies"). Participation in such activities lowers visual attention to both the program and commercials. Despite its valuable contribution, the study suffers from some methodological drawbacks: the observers were graduate students acting as if they were doing their homework and covertly observing members of their own household or visitors to their household. The data for the dependent variable consisted of a crude measure of visual attention expressed as the amount of time the viewer was seen overtly watching the television screen. Each subject was only watched for approximately one hour. Although this was an attempt to capture the naturalistic setting, it fails to account for social interaction and temporal patterns, and the attempt is tainted by the fact that the observer is a part of the viewing experience as well as a

part of the household and thus a vital player of the social context surrounding the viewing experience.

Another research that used in-home observations to gain insight into the consumption of television advertising is Zwaga (1992). Informants were filmed in the context of their living room using a specially prepared television set. Zwaga (1992) did not attempt to generate a comprehensive framework for explaining consumer behavior during the commercial break and instead simply reported one to few episodes from each of the households in the study. Despite this limited focus, Zwaga (1992) documents how for consumers the commercial break can represent an opportunity for engaging in routine activities (e.g., getting dressed in the morning or bringing the dessert from the kitchen).

Media research could provide a useful source of input into the study of potential audiences for television advertising. The under-investigation of contextual factors other than the program context in understanding the reception of television advertising contrasts with the commonly accepted definition of context as applied to other forms of mass media reception. During the last twenty years there has been an “ethnographic turn” within media research (Moore 1993). The acknowledgment of contextual factors derived from the field of cultural studies. The works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary cultural studies and of those researchers directly influenced by or linked to that school, such as Hall, Morley and Willis aimed at exploring how the interpretation of popular media (e.g., television, newspaper and popular art), influenced and reinforced contemporary society. When data were collected by these scholars, they mostly took the form of in-depth interviews and in some instances of video recordings (Allen 1989). Within the Birmingham School the interpretive and cultural resources that a reader brings in to the reading of a specific text were investigated. According to Stern (1989) this treatment of reception research within cultural studies can be regarded as belonging to a more general trend of reader response theories in a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Reception of media is no longer regarded as a form of passive processing of messages, but instead as an active form of sense making (Radway 1995). The typical conception of television viewing has moved from passivity to activity (Fiske 1987). Rather than looking at viewers as passively accepting the meanings of television, viewers are now seen as active in constructing interpretations of television meaning (Livingstone 1990). Following this notion of the active viewer, reception of mass media must be viewed as embedded in the practices of everyday life where the social influences on the process of interpretation are acknowledged. Within media research the acts of socially constructed readings of texts have been an object of study (e.g., Lull 1990; Morley 1988; Silverstone 1990).

The diverse social contexts of viewing, the variable nature of viewer's involvement, and the proliferation of media technologies have transformed watching television into an activity that is essentially diverse and context-dependent.

(Livingstone 1993, p. 8)

This ethnographic research often takes place within a household setting, and studies the act of viewing within a social context. Media research tends to regard the social context as constitutive of its meaning, and deals with relational elements such as status, power, rights and responsibilities (e.g., Fiske 1987; Lunt 1995).

Once one takes seriously the fact that television is a domestic medium (and is characterized by program forms specifically designed for that purpose) it becomes clear that the domestic context of TV viewing is not some secondary factor, which can subsequently be sketched in. Rather, the domestic context of TV viewing, it becomes clear, is constitutive of its meaning.

(Morley 1995, p. 321)

Moore defines the social context as the everyday *micro-settings* that consist of "the routine physical locations and interpersonal relations of reception" (1993, p. 32).

Television viewing consists of a repertoire of both solitary and interactional routines. Lindlof and Grodin (1990) state that during television viewing routines it might be permissible to interrupt another's viewing or to make conversation. Thus the sociality of the viewing experience affects the reception of TV viewing. For TV viewing that takes place in a social context the traditional sender-receiver model does not provide a good explanation (Fiske 1990). In line with this Jordin and Brunt (1988) argue that because decoding often is a group activity it should be treated as a genuinely "social process".

Lull (1988b) questions the notion of attentive viewing by claiming it to be a very relative concept, and argues that there is no such a thing as full attention to the screen. Lindlof et al. (1988) describe attention directed towards the television as cycled into a larger pattern of social action. There are other ways of viewing than the relatively focused viewing. One possible cycle is monitoring, occurring "when an activity, one which typically requires burst of attention, is pursued in the viewing vicinity with television engaged as a secondary source of interest" (p. 177). Another cycle is idling. According to Lindlof et al. "idling is a temporal use of television in the context of other segments of social action." (p.178). Idling takes place in between assignments, where the individual is temporarily and unintentionally engaged in the viewing situation.

The cultural space where the main television set is placed, and in which the social viewing of television often takes place, bears different meanings for different household members. TV viewing takes place in a complex and powerful context where households are bounded, conflictful and contradictory. This means that being engaged in watching television can not be considered as a one-dimensional activity with the same meaning or importance at all times for all who engage in the activity (Morley 1992). TV viewing in a social context thus involves relational elements such as status, power, right and responsibilities, and also involves a set of practices for media use (Anderson and Meyer 1988). The social relations within which, any act of media consumption takes place will put limits on the polysemy and interpretive freedoms (Slater 1997). Viewing is often non selective, since many times the viewer gets exposed to something chosen by someone else. This kind of viewing is referred

to as “enforced viewing” (Morley 1988). Television and other type of media play a vital role in the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relations (Lull 1990).

The viewing setting is a convenient social setting for people to communicate. Palmer argues children use what is on TV in their social interactions in at least two ways: “Firstly, children’s ways of relating to TV are part of their everyday behavior...Secondly, television viewing was often a part of the ongoing social relationships within families” (1988, p. 148). Lull underlines that the viewing experience “is a family activity that involves an intermeshing of the constantly changing personal agendas, moods, and emotional priorities of each family member” (1988a, p. 17). Each social actor enters the viewing experience with a set of normative rules that are formal or informal and applied directly or indirectly. Lull (1980) has identified two primary types of social uses of television: structural (environmental/regulative) and relational (communication facilitation, affiliation/avoidance, social learning, competence/dominance).

Reid and Frazer (1980) found in a study about children and advertising different types of social uses of advertising in the family life on the part of the children. Advertisements are used by children both as a way to start conversations and in attempts to avoid requests and demands by others (Reid and Frazer 1980). Moreover children bring in other people in discussions about advertisements as a part of their sense making processes (Reid and Frazer, 1980). Reid and Frazer study has a focus on the social uses of advertising among children. Otherwise advertising studies within media research tend to exist in the form of a commentary on the nature of advertising (e.g., Williams 1975) or a deconstruction of ads (e.g., Williamson 1978). The potential audiences for television advertising have not received the same empirical attention as other types of media.

Re-Contextualization of the Audiences for Advertising

With the arrival of a stream of interpretive consumer research (Brown 1995), and with a growing interest in anthropological studies of different consumption phenomena

(Sherry 1995), comes naturally a strive to put different contextual factors on the research agenda. However, the actual acts of consuming television and advertising in the types of environment where the behavior typically occurs have not gained a lot of attention in consumer research. One possible reason for this is, as O'Guinn and Shrum comment, that "watching television is so common that we may simply be too immersed to observe its influence" (1997, p. 279). Instead people are studied as "if they are solitary subjects, without identities, who react to ads through linear stages or limited persuasion routes, for the purpose of judging brands" (Mick and Buhl 1992, p. 317). Buttle stresses that in order to produce comprehensive theory of audiences for advertising one needs to utilize methods that account "for the way in which advertising is integrated in social practices which make up social life, and... for the way in which those practices are themselves modified by advertising" (1991, p. 10).

Few people switch on the television with the aim to watch television advertising. Instead, people sit down to watch television in order to catch specific programs (Livingstone 1990), to relax (Barwise and Hammond 1998), or to use television viewing as a way of socializing with friends and family (e.g., Anderson and Meyer 1988; Lull 1980). Placing the advertisement in the center of a viewing experience gives a representation of the viewing experience that is far removed from the naturally occurring behavior. Instead the potential audiences for advertising need to be re-contextualized. Television advertising enters people's living room as an unsolicited form of communication (Mick et al. 2004). The obtrusive nature of the commercial break can infringe on the viewer's motivation to watch. It is different to watch something because you have chosen to watch it than to watch something that literally has been enforced upon you. If a viewer decides to watch the commercial break in a program while watching alone it is a motivated act (Scott 1994). The motivation to watch might be affected by the time of the day, and the life world and everyday matters currently on the viewer's mind. Since much television viewing takes places within the context of a home, it also provides the viewer with many competing attention-grabbing sources for the action space. Also the program context (e.g., Tavassoli, Shultz and Fitzimons 1995), or the position of an advertisement in the advertising pod (Zufryden et al. 1993) might affect the audiences for advertising.

Given that viewing television in a household is an activity often undertaken in the company of others (Barwise and Erhenberg 1988), or at least with other people in the near proximity of the room where the main television set is placed, a researcher interested in investigating the naturally occurring behavior at the time of a potential advertisement exposure has to take into consideration the effect that the presence of others have on the behavior. Sitting in the armchair or on the sofa with others when the TV set is on is a genuinely social process that includes elements of discussion and commentary (Jordin and Brunt 1988). Moreover, in a social context people sometimes resort to using advertising as way of keeping communication channels open (Ritson and Elliot 1999). A non-qualified guess would be that the social viewer during a commercial break will be affected by the people around him at the time of possible exposure to advertising. In a household the social context affecting the viewing behavior is changing depending on the time of the day. The viewing takes place in the context of a home, an environment that is filled with routines and social processes (Lewin 2001), which means that the viewing activity plays an important part of the politics of the household (Morley 1992). Every member of the household brings into the viewing experience her life-world and everyday matters which in turn are bound to affect the audiences for advertising that takes place within a household.

To summarize, potential audiences for television advertising are found in an environment rich of contextual factors; the temporal context, the home and the everyday life context, the social context, as, as well as the program context are important contextual dimensions in which the particular behaviors during the commercial break are embedded. Given the highly contextual environment, and the differing nature of commercial content in comparison to editorial content, an audience-centered rather than an advertising-centered focus on the potential audiences for television advertising is needed in order to get a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

Despite the rapid development of interpretive research within consumer research, no interpretive work has explored environments where the possible encounters with television advertising take place. The few interpretive consumer researchers that do explore advertising favor the textual analysis of ads (e.g., Scott 1994; Stern 1993), the general role of advertising (e.g., McCracken 1987), meaning-based interpretation of

advertising (e.g., Mick and Buhl 1992) or the social uses of advertising (e.g., O'Donohoe 1994; Ritson and Elliot 1999). The potential encounters with advertising at the time of the reception have been virtually ignored (Mick et al. 2004). The methodological development within the field of cultural studies offers consumer research possible inquiry approaches to investigate the potential audiences for advertising at the time of the reception. This thesis is thus located within the theoretical and methodological gap that exist between cultural studies and advertising research with an aim to contribute to the development of a more complex understanding of naturally occurring television advertising consumption.

Chapter 3

Methodological Points of Departure

Throughout its brief history consumer research has been dominated by a philosophical approach governed by logical empiricism (Deshpande 1983). A revolution that started during the 1960's within the philosophy of science literature (Lynch and Bogen 1997) led to the acceptance of relativism as a philosophical stance within most social sciences (Anderson 1983). However, this movement went almost unnoticed within the field of consumer marketing (Peter 1982).

Relativism implies that there are few truly universal standards of scientific adequacy. Instead, different research programs (i.e. disciplines, sub disciplines, or collections of disciplines) will adhere to different methodological, ontological and metaphysical commitments.

(Anderson 1983, p.25)

Nonetheless, the call for a philosophical discourse within the discipline (Anderson 1983; Deshpande 1983; Olsen and Peter 1983) in the early 1980's served to ignite a heated debate that eventually introduced a relativist influence to consumer research (Brown 1995).

Ultimately, the development of science within a discipline is secured by the ongoing discourses between different paradigmatic stances. Each school of thought will strive to achieve acknowledgement, and compete for dominance of some sort through the dominance of leading journals and in the curriculum (Kuhn 1970). Interparadigmatic competition creates the need within each paradigm to fortify its arguments in order to endure the ongoing debate without losing in authority and strength.

Moreover, different paradigms complement a discipline by providing different methodological “toolkits” (Belk 1991). In fact, with a move to a more diverse construction of a discipline follows a wider range of phenomena that will be possible to explain or understand. With the advent of other philosophical approaches within consumer research it became possible to embark upon the exploration of research questions that would have been difficult or impossible to explore in with the traditional dominant quantitative methods such as surveys or experimental research (Peter 1991). Looking at a multiparadigmatic discipline this way, every new paradigm will serve to complement the structure of the discipline and also expand its theoretical range (Holbrook 1995). Provided, of course, each new paradigm is an internally consistent approach to science.

I hold all questions of methodology to be ultimately pragmatic ones, to be determined according to the resources available and the particular type of data needed to answer specific questions, and would further hold that all methodological choices... incur what an economist would call ‘opportunity cost’ - in terms of the other possibilities excluded by any particular choice of method.

(Morley 1992, p.13).

The Interpretive Paradigm

What is now labeled as the interpretive paradigm (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) before being established as a paradigm went through a plethora of different terms such as subjective (Rubenstein 1981), naturalistic (Lincoln and Guba 1985), qualitative (Van

Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner 1982) and humanistic (Hirschmann 1986). The interpretive approach is particularly suitable when one is interested in exploring a specific phenomenon in a particular time and place (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Cardinal to the interpretive paradigm is to take into consideration the contexts within which a particular behavior occur.

...Interpretivists take a more historical, particularistic approach to research: that is they study a specific behavior in a particular place and time. Rather than seeking to determine law like regularities, the interpretivists seek to determine motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences that are time- and context-bound.

(Hudson and Ozanne 1988, p. 511).

Interpretivists believe that a phenomenon can only be understood in the “context of the person-in-the-world” (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989, p.136). Thompson et al. (1989) underline that at particular settings certain events will stand out while others will recede into the background, and that what is standing might change depending on the perspective being used (figure/ground metaphor).

For the interpretivist the aim of the investigation into a human phenomenon is centered on reaching an interpretation, rather than on attaining objective knowledge (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Interpretive research reaches an understanding of a specific phenomenon through gathering data in naturalistic settings, through purposive sampling, and with the means of an emergent design.

Naturalistic Setting

Interpretivists argue that the context in which a behavior arises will influence the meaning of the phenomenon in question (Ozanne and Hudson 1989). Observing a

specific phenomenon in isolation from other phenomena with which it usually co-occur, and is embedded with, consequently will change the interpretation of that phenomenon (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Thus observing a particular behavior in a laboratory setting will change the meaning of this behavior. In order to understand a particular phenomenon, the interpretive researcher therefore seeks to undertake the investigation in places where the particular phenomenon is likely to occur in the every day world (Belk et al. 1988). In the naturalistic pursuit the researcher enters a different context, whereas in a laboratory study it is the subject that is entering the context of the researcher. Setting out for a naturalistic setting reduces dramatically the control that the researcher has over the research environment, and thus offers a less convenient methodological tool for the gathering of information.

Purposive Sampling

Comparative processes guide the data collection within the interpretive paradigm (Spiggle 1994).

Sampling is not carried out for the sake of drawing a group that is representative of some population to which findings are to be generalized. Nor is the sample selected in ways that satisfy statistical requirements of randomness. The sample is selected to serve a different purpose, hence the term 'purposive sampling' if used to describe the process.

(Guba and Lincoln 1989, p. 178).

Thus in this approach the researcher is putting emphasis on getting more in-depth information from relatively few people in order to gain insights into the deeper meanings of a phenomenon, like for example advertising consumption (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). The interpretive researcher selects informants according to one of six possible agendas (Patton 1990):

- 1) Extreme or deviant cases
- 2) Typical or archetypal cases
- 3) Cases that represents maximum variation in one location
- 4) Critical cases of extreme urgency or seriousness
- 5) Politically important cases, and
- 6) Convenience of particular informants

However, these cases are not mutually exclusive and data collection strategies can be combined and altered as part of an emergent design (Huberman and Miles 1994).

Emergent Design

The emphasis of interpretations arising in the hermeneutic circle and the impracticality of the human research instrument means that the interpretive design must allow for and cope with the spectrum of directions that the inquiry might take (Guba and Lincoln 1994). This means that interpretive research is a fundamentally reflexive and constantly changing process, where the analysis is performed simultaneously with the data collection. Thus the approach is dependent on an emergent design (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The emergent design approach differs from the traditional linear models of social research (e.g., survey or experimental research) which assumes that the researcher understands the phenomenon before doing the research, so that hypotheses, a specific data collection and an analysis plan are possible to define a priori, and where the research process starts from hypotheses, moves through data collection and ends with analysis. Instead, with an emergent approach, the research design is adapted throughout the process of the study. In naturalistic research, the researcher builds an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs in situ. The researcher chose interactional sites in which the phenomenon of interest is known to occur. The first step is to observe and record the phenomenon in detail. Analysis is not only

performed after data collection. Instead analysis begins during the initial collection of data and continues throughout the process.

The emergent design permits continuous adjustment of the sample to focus on those units that are most relevant for developing or testing an interpretation until redundancy of information is achieved.

(Belk et al. 1988, p. 454)

Data gathered form a basis for an interpretation which then defines what further data is required to test the interpretation. This process continues until a saturation level is reached where further data collection becomes redundant.

Methods within the Interpretive Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm hosts a number of methodological approaches that differs in their empirical focus, for example: ethnography (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994), introspection (Gould 1995), phenomenology (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989), semiotics (Mick 1986), structuralism (Levy 1981), and textual analysis (Stern 1996). The methodological approach chosen should be dependent on the particular phenomenon that is to be investigated (Peter 1989). The choice of method is thus relative to the focus of the specific inquiry. When the particular phenomenon of interest is a particular behavior, the ethnographic method renders itself as an applicable choice of method.

...rather than asking people to comment about what they do or say, as in phenomenological interviews, ethnographers prefer to observe them doing it; instead of observing people doing what they might do or say if real-world complexities did not impose on them, as in laboratory experiments, ethnographers observe actual people's behavior in real time; and rather than asking respondents to generalize about their

behavior in survey research, ethnographers record the particulars of naturally occurring behaviors and conversations.

(Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, p. 486).

Ethnographic Consumer Research

Starting from the 1990s there has been a surge in the number of ethnographic accounts of consumption practices. Examples of such works are studies on consumption and the homeless (Hill, 1991); seasonal consumption habits (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994); collecting (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry and Holbrook, 1991); brand loyalty (Olsen 1995); service encounters (Arnould and Price, 1993); consumption sites like in Penaloza's (2001) study on cattle trade shows and rodeos, Holt's (1995) study on baseball games, and McGrath, Sherry and Heisley's (1993) study on a Midwestern farmer's market; and on subcultures of consumptions like in Kates' (2003) study on gay consumers, Kozinets' (2001) on Star Trek Fans, and Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) on Harley Davidson bikers. Worth noting is that most of these studies take place in the public, rather than the private sphere of consumption. This might be a consequence of the difficulty of getting access to informants in the latter case.

Using video recordings to study behavior has mostly been confined to workplace environments (Emmison and Smith 2000). However, in recent years, consumer researchers have started to realize the potential of using videography (e.g., Belk 2002; Kozinets 2002). The possibility to revisit the recordings, over and over again, makes the visual method a powerful tool to capture social interaction because "it is the language of motion that defines love, and hate, anger and delight, and other qualities of behavior" (Collier and Collier 1986, p.140). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the content of a video recording is the result of its specific context, and that there will always be a multitude of ways to interpret the visual material (Pink 2001).

The Ethnographic Method

The ethnographic method emerged as a research strategy within the social sciences during the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. The works by scholars such as Boas and Malinowski, based on studies of various native cultures around the world, secured the ethnographic method's presence within the social sciences (Sanday 1979).

The original purpose of ethnographic studies was to educate Western civilizations on the lifestyles and cultures of 'primitive' populations throughout the world, but over time the approach was increasingly used to explore phenomena closer to home (Cole 1977).

The ethnographer attempts to discover the practices and meanings that the members of the group take for granted; in so doing, the culture of the group is grasped.

(Denzin 1978, p.157)

The method relies on the principles of naturalism, discovery and understanding and is oriented towards capturing naturally occurring human behavior (Hammersley 1991). The underpinning assumption is that events and processes are dependent on the context in which they take place. Optimally, the researcher starts out with a general interest in a phenomenon, theoretical issue or practical problem, but with minimal assumptions about the specific behavior in question, in order to maximize the capability of learning about the behavior. Thus it is necessary to learn the culture of the group before one can produce a valid understanding of the behavior.

In order to understand a consumption phenomenon the ethnographic process requires that the researcher locates a naturalistic context where it takes place. When immersed in the context, the researcher can collect two types of data: observation and interviews. There is no universal prescription of the balance between the different modes of data collection (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Instead the methodological

stance will be dictated by the nature of the phenomenon that is being explored. Informant interview data will bring in a “culturally particular understanding to interpretation” (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, p. 490), while the observational data will bring in a “rich experiential context” (Becker and Geer 1970, p. 139-141).

Depending on the type of research question, different styles of observational method can be chosen. The observer role has a broad range, from full participation to non-participation to mechanical observation (Adler and Adler 1987). A mechanical observation includes taking photographs, making audiotapes, and filming consumers in moments of consumption (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). In researching a phenomenon in the private sphere, for example when one wishes to record the behavior of a family or a household, non-participant observation can be useful (Whiting and Whiting 1970). Also the ethnographic interview can differ in style on a continuum from totally open-ended interviews to closed survey-style questions (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The verbal reports are based on what informants feel, have been through and have come to expect like memories and mental pictures that can not be recorded by observation only.

There are no prescriptive formulae to guide the ethnographer in how to go about collecting data, what balance there should be between interview and observation, or how to analyze the data. There are, however, some guidelines. Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) recommend that a researcher who wants to use an ethnographic method should adhere to a series of methodological guidelines. Firstly, pre-eminence should be given to systematic data collection and recording of human action in natural settings. Secondly, research of this kind requires extended observation by the researcher in a specific cultural context. Third, the interpretations of the consumption phenomenon that the ethnographic study produces should be credible in the eyes of the informants, as well as in the eyes of the intended audience. This criterion does not imply that the researcher should naively copy down the words of the informants. The researcher brings into the interpretation a broader cultural understanding. For an account to be credible in the eyes of an informant, the researcher needs to make sure that the account is not offensive to the informant and that it does not break the trust

between the researcher and the informant, rather than ensure that every word is signed for by the informant. The fourth feature is that a researcher in employing the ethnographic method should use multiple sources of data in order to generate varying aspects of the behaviors and context of interest. To further ensure the trustworthiness of ethnographic research Wallendorf and Belk (1989) also propose the usage of member checks and a triangulation of researchers.

In an ethnographic account both the “emic” (details of what the informants act, do and say) voice, as well as the “etic” (the ethnographer and his or her knowledge of theory) voice are present. The ethnographer strives for the selection of “cultural themes” (Spradley 1980, p. 141), which emerge from the analysis of the ethnographic text.

[Cultural themes are]... any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning.

(Spradley 1980, p. 141)

The interpretation of those cultural themes is the analytical goal of an ethnographic study. Hill describes this process as if “the ethnographer leaves the field and creates a certain amount of distance between him/herself and informants” (Hill 1993, p.59). As such the formation of the themes forms the culmination of the ethnographic account of a particular culture. However, the researcher has to be careful as to not hastily make an interpretation when studying behaviors that take place in a familiar setting, since familiarity can stand in the way of fully understanding a certain micro culture (Hammersley 1991).

The Act of Interpretation or the Hermeneutical Circle

The process by which the researcher arrives at the interpretation of human behavior, as well as the aim of the process is called *Verstehen*, or understanding (Patton 1990). Methods within the interpretive paradigm, such as the ethnographic method, that strive for *verstehen* can be regarded as hermeneutic since they stress the necessity to grasp the situation or context in order to get an understanding of a specific action (Schwandt 2000).

The techniques used to formulate an interpretation are embedded in a framework of core assumptions where the interpretation of data takes place in a circular series of part-to-whole iterations (Thompson 1997). Researchers must decide for themselves what assumptions about reality they will embrace and then follow the research strategies appropriate to those assumptions (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Morgan and Smireich 1980). Within the hermeneutic process there are intra-text and inter-text cycles (Thompson 1997). Within an intra-text cycle a text, for example an interview transcript, is read in its entirety as a way to grasp a sense of the whole. The text is then read over and over again in order to gain a holistic understanding of the conveyed consumer meanings. This renders the interpreter an idiographic understanding of each informant's accounts (Thompson et al. 1989). While ideally the researcher would like to achieve a total insight into the phenomena (i.e., the purely subjective viewpoint of the informant), this is an impossible endeavor as no interpretation can fully "capture lived experience" (Denzin 1994). In the inter-textual cycle, on the other hand, the aim is to locate patterns and differences across the texts, or interview transcripts. These patterns are referred to as themes (Hirschman 1990; Thompson et al. 1989). Thompson et al. (1990) argue that the patterns should be "visible and comprehensible" to others. A text read later in the process can give important insights, which will lead to a new interpretation of a previously interpreted text. There are iterative processes between the inter-textual and intra-textual cycles. These iterative processes between the parts and the whole are according to Thompson et al. (1994) necessary, since an integrated understanding of a text must be developed over time. Thompson et al. (1989) argue further that it is essential for the researcher to refer back to individual transcripts in order to make sure that the global themes are not expressed in an abstract tone that is too far removed from the informant's experiences.

Thompson (1997) argues in line with Gadamer (1993) that within the hermeneutic circle there is a fusion of the inquirer's set of references and the texts that are being interpreted. This means that the researcher does not enter the interpretation process as a blank sheet, but rather as tainted by her previous experiences, knowledge and areas of interest. However, once in contact with textual data, the researcher can revise her initial interpretive standpoint. Besides the intra-textual and inter-textual iterative processes, there are thus also iterative processes going on between the inquirer and the texts, and the inquirer and the informants. McCracken (1988) stresses that the researcher should acknowledge that she is biased by previous experiences and knowledge and try to manufacture a distance from the known, and try to see familiar data in an unfamiliar way in order to avoid misinterpretations to arise.

From Data Collection to Verstehen

To gain an understanding of consumer experiences Janesick (2000, p.387-388) recommends the inquirer to have the following points in mind while undertaking the iterative process of developing the themes of interpretation:

1. Look for meaning, the perspective of the participants in the study.
2. Look for relationships regarding the structure, occurrence, and distribution of events over time.
3. Look for points of tension: What does not fit? What are the conflicting points of evidence in the case?

It is important to stress that the categories for interpreting are not pre-given or fixed within ethnographic research (Hammersley 1991). By using an inductive approach the patterns and themes arise from the data, rather than being imposed prior to data collection and analysis. According to Patton (1990) there are two ways of representing the patterns that are rising from the analysis of the verbal reports and observations. First, the researcher can use the categories developed and articulated by the informants to organize the presentation of global themes. Second, the researcher may

also become conscious of categories or patterns for which the informants did not have labels or terms, and develop terms to describe these inductively generated themes.

According to McCracken (1988) the goal of the inquirer's analysis is to determine categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the informants' views on the topic in particular as well as the more general picture. McCracken underlines that: "the exact manner in which the investigator will travel the path from data to observations, conclusions, and scholarly assertion cannot and should not be fully specified" (1988, p.41). One important reason for this is that different questions pose for different strategies. Miles and Huberman state that: "coding is analysis" (1994, p.56). Ryan and Bernard (2000) second to that by claiming that by finding the themes through the process inductive coding process a lot of the interpretative analysis has already been done.

Studying a certain behavior will necessarily incur the exploration of a whole array of behaviors that naturally co-occur (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The etic understanding of multiple behaviors that co-occur results in the recognition of a behavioral constellation (McCracken 1989a). The researcher, when performing ethnographic inquiries, reaches an interpretation by joining observational and verbal data in a way that underlines tensions in the form of disparities between them (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). There is no absolute rule or even a clearly stated recommendation about the order in which the collected data should be analyzed and interpreted. In this way the process of interpretation is highly intuitive and the researcher has to make up her mind about where to start in relation to each specific project. Thus many solutions will be ad-hoc ones (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; McCracken 1988). Arnould and Wallendorf claim that an interpretation arises when "a disjuncture exists between observed behavior and the overgeneralizations, glosses, and claims of idiosyncrasy in verbal reports" (1994, p.494). The inquirer starts out the interpretation process with the coding of emic categories and budding etic understandings that notes phenomena that occur across texts; such phenomena can be words, phrases, complex behavioral sequences and meanings (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Ryan and Bernard 2000). These codes arise when the inquirer studies the data and notices reoccurrences. Codes for different data material are

triangulated and compared to other behaviors in the behavior constellation (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). These comparisons are the cornerstones of the construction of tropes, which are “meaningful symbolic links between various behaviors and verbal statements” (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, p.498). The process of troping restructures the initial coding into constructs that takes the form of themes (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Patton, 1990).

Through the interpretive activities of coding and troping, layers of meaning comprising an interaction are developed and checked across informants and across multiple sources of data about the numerous behaviors that form a constellation. Ethnographic interpretation articulates constructs that are shared, resonant, or discrepant across the constellation/ / It is this multilayered and cultural nature of ethnographic interpretation that is referenced in Geertz’s (1973) often-cited term *thick description*: it is the desired outcome that ethnographers refer to as a richly textured interpretation.

(Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, pp.498-499)

According to Guba (1978) global themes can be evaluated by two criteria: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Internal homogeneity means that the content within a global theme is consistent. External heterogeneity, on the other hand, means that the content of different global themes does not overlap. Guba argues that: “the existence of a large number of unassignable or overlapping data items is good evidence of some basic fault of the category system” (1978, p. 53). An important element of the hermeneutic circle is continuity. In fact the process of interpretation can be regarded as never-ending.

While some interpretivists do try to identify patterns of behavior their central goal is understanding. Understanding involves grasping the individual and shared meanings. Interpretivist researchers may state interpretations – their present understanding – however they view understanding as a never ending hermeneutic circle.

(Ozanne and Hudson, 1989, p.2)

This means that the interpretation is never complete and no understanding will be the same the second time around. For the interpretive researcher the interpretation of the particular phenomenon in the process of *verstehen* is only one of many other possible interpretations (Thompson et al. 1989). The power of the particular interpretation as such does not lie in its ability to objectively reflect an external reality, but in the degree to which the researcher understands the phenomenon in question.

Analyzing Behavior

As previously told in this study behavior is limited to what can be observed by a film camera. Behavior is as a consequence defined as what people are doing and saying. Behavioral components that can be recorded as present or absent by a camera are actions, utterances (while watching alone), body posture, social interaction, physical contact between people, and talk. There is no social life without attention being exchanged and distributed (Derber 1979). Derber (1979) argues that as a unique social resource, attention is created anew in each in each encounter and allocated in a way that deeply affects human interaction. In households the activities of families and friends are arranged through talk (Silverman 2000). Therefore much of what is observed in a particular setting will consist of conversation. Linguistic behavior is governed by rules and therefore follows patterns and constraints (Saville-Troike 1989). In groups the functions of communication are directly related to the participants' purposes and goals. These functions are expressing (conveying feelings or emotions), directive (requesting or demanding), referential (true or false propositional content), poetic (aesthetic), phatic (empathy and solidarity), and meta-linguistic (reference to the language itself) (Saville-Toike 1989). Communicative competence is embedded in the notion of cultural competence. According to Saville-Troike this communicative competence "involves not only the language code, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation" (1989, p.21).

Hymes (1972) argues that in order to analyze communication the inquirer has to look at the spoken language as discrete units with recognizable boundaries; such units are situations, events and acts. The situation is defined as the context in which the communication occurs. A situation could be for example a cocktail party or train ride. The situation might remain the same even if the location changes, but might also change at for example different times of the day. The term event is used as a basic unit for descriptive purposes. An event consists of a unified set of components and terminates if there is a change in major participants, their role-relationships or the focus of attention. A boundary between events can be marked by a period of silence or a change of body posture. Finally, the term act is synonymous with a single interactional function, for example a referential statement, a request or a command. An act might be both verbal and nonverbal. Even silence may be an intentional and conventional communicative act. According to Patton (1990) it is important not to overlook the non-verbal communications and to observe what does not happen in a certain situation.

Once you have found your puzzle, the best method is often to *work back and forth* through your transcript to see how the puzzle arises and how it is solved.

(Silverman, 2000, p.831)

In order to make sense of social interaction, the researcher has to revisit the conversations over and over again. Silverman gives the following suggestions for analyzing talk (2000, p. 831):

- Always try to identify sequences of related talk.
- Try to examine how speakers take on certain identities through their talk (e.g., questioner/answerer).

- Look for particular outcomes in the talk (e.g., a request for clarification, a repair, laughter) and look backward to trace the trajectory through which a particular outcome was produced.

Analyzing Interview Talk

Within ethnographic research, interview data is not seen as providing accurate statements of behavior, but rather as a source for providing the emic angle of social action (Warren 2002). This emic perspective consists of informants' subjective understanding of their own behavior and other people's behavior. Verbal reports are important tools to identify overgeneralizations (informants might understate the variation in the actions reported), glosses (informants might use metaphors for depicting events where the underlying meaning is taken for granted), and claims of idiosyncrasies (informants might think that their experiences are unique or different from other people's experiences) (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). For example an overgeneralization from an informant could be: "I am always zapping channel when the ad break comes on". This kind of incidents within the verbal reports should not lead to the dismissal of the data as unreliable or deceptive, but rather as accounting for the emic meaning of a certain behavior.

According to Atkinson and Coffey (2002) the interview talk, consisting of memories, experiences and motives, is to be regarded as one kind of action. Atkinson and Coffey (2002) therefore call for a methodological principle of symmetry, where both the observed and the narrated, the interview account, ought to be treated as types of social action. Just as no one paradigm should take precedence over a discipline, and no one method should dominate a paradigm, no one data source should be privileged within a particular method.

It is not necessary to assert the primacy of one form of data over another, or to assert one primacy over another // Rather, interviews become equally valid ways of capturing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world.

(Atkinson and Coffey, 2002, p.811)

Group interviews can be useful if the purpose of the interview is to get an understanding of events and experiences that are shared by the members of a group (Fontana and Frey 2000). Group interviews promote a pooling of accounts that leads to a multiple construction of routines, events and experiences, and have therefore the capacity to augment the soundness, the detail and the richness of the informants' accounts (Ritson and Elliot 1999).

The goal of an ethnographic interview is according to Warren to “unveil the distinctive meaning-making actions of interview participants” (2002, p.86). Warren (2002) discusses the different kinds of questions that are possible during an interview; there are the main questions, which serve the purpose of introducing and guiding the interview and the follow-up questions that tail the answers given to main questions. Warren (2002) underlines the importance for an interviewer to be sensitive to the surfacing of new meanings that might arise during the course of the interview.

McCracken (1988) warns the prospective interviewer to not fall into the trap of active listening. In this type of listening the interviewer/listener is searching for hidden meanings and might risk putting words in the informant's mouth. McCracken claims that the approach of active listening is obtrusive in a way that ethnographic research is not supposed to be, and proclaims instead the virtue of non-direction in ethnographic interviews and comments that it is essential that: “the investigator allow the respondent to tell his or her own story in his or her own terms” (1988, p.22). However, this does not mean that an interview should be without structure. McCracken (1988) therefore recommends the usage of a string of verbal prompts in order to provide a sort of structure to the interview. Johnson (2002) states the importance of using a tape recorder for in-depth interviews, since one of the aims

interpretive research is to grasp the words and emic accounts, and claims further that without a word for word interview protocol the interpretation would be neither valid nor of interest. The latter interviews in a series of interviews are according to Johnson (2002) more focused to their nature, and will also serve as verification of the knowledge gained earlier on in the interview project. Data collection and verification can be said to go hand in hand. At a certain point the interview project reaches a saturation level, where the learning curve has peaked and further interviews mostly serve as a confirmation (Johnson, 2002).

Evaluative Criteria

Evaluative criteria are vital in order for interpretive inquiry to attain scientific status (Schwandt 1994). Since the interpretive paradigm rests on a relativistic view of the nature of reality (concepts often referred to as ontology or axiology) it needs to adhere to a set of criteria which are contiguous with its epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Unfortunately, in the past the interpretive discipline has mistakenly been evaluated against the criteria developed for logical empiricism. Rather than seeking law-like regularities interpretive researchers seek to determine a type of knowledge that is idiographic, time bound and context dependent, therefore "...the criteria of a designated research protocol, a priori hypotheses that identify independent and dependent variables, standardized instruction and communication on the part of the researcher, and statistical significance" (p.515) are not consistent with the research process and its' outcome (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

Since the output of the interpretive inquiry is an interpretation, Thompson (1990) argues that the only suitable evaluation criterion of interpretive research should be to what degree of insight regarding the phenomenon being studied that the reader gets from reading the text. In evaluating the quality of the empirical results of this thesis, or another piece of interpretive research, it seems intuitively correct that the overall evaluation should be related to whether the current interpretation brings an understanding of the particular phenomenon being studied in the life world of the

informant/interpreter/evaluator. However, it can be questioned if an insight of the particular phenomenon is the only criterion applicable in assessing the quality of a particular piece of work. Clearly the overall evaluation must also take into consideration criteria as the quality of the literature review and the suitability of the methodological choice. Arnold and Fischer (1994, p.64) have established a set of criteria for assessing and evaluating interpretive work that take several aspects of the interpretive work into consideration:

- “The interpretation must be coherent and free of contradiction. Observations should be supported by relevant examples”.
- “A command of the relevant literature will be evident. Tradition must be acknowledged”.
- “The interpretation should be comprehensible to the reading audience, given their [pre-]understanding. It should show ‘good will’ by adapting to them and taking into account their world view”.
- “The interpretation should ‘enlighten’. It is ‘fruitful’ in revealing new dimensions of the problem at hand. ‘[W]hat is evident is always something surprising as well, like a new light being turned on,’ says Gadamer (1989, p. 486). It yields insight that leads to revision of [pre-]understanding. This revision should be made quite explicit”.
- “The prose should be persuasive, engaging, interesting, stimulating, and appealing (McCloskey 1983). Allusions, metaphors, similes, and analogies serve hermeneutics well. The cultural literacy of the authors will be apparent”.

These criteria represent a clear and concise template for evaluation. Further, the criteria go beyond simply judging the quality of the final interpretive writing style, since they also take into consideration other elements of the inquiry process. The criteria have been subject of significant peer review in order to get published in *Journal of Consumer Research*, one of the leading journals of the consumer research

discipline. This can be regarded as an indication of their acceptance within the discipline as such.

The Use of Theory in Ethnographic Articles

As highlighted by the section above on emergent design, at the start of a research project the researcher is like a blank canvas, in that no prior specification of expected results should contaminate the researcher's ability to observe and probe.

In reporting ethnographic work, previous research and theory enter the manuscript in two ways. First, they appear in a literature review before the account of the particular ethnography. Second, they appear within the ethnographical account in order to qualify the findings.

Before presenting the findings the researcher reviews the pertinent literature (Arnould and Price 1993). The recognition of relevant literature is important and tradition should be acknowledged in order to anchor the ethnography within the existing body of research (Arnold and Price 1994). Earlier research is being reviewed in order to develop an understanding of those aspects of the phenomenon that are deemed essential for an understanding of the research. This literature review is usually based on readings from diverse areas of research. In addition to this early literature review, the findings are qualified by literature (Belk et al 1989). In the discussion of the findings previous research is documented to underline the importance and the plausibility of the ethnographic account (Arnould and Price 1993).

This means that for ethnographic research theory serves a purpose that is fundamentally different from that of theory within hypothetico-deductive endeavors such as experimental research. Rather than providing a means for the generation of hypotheses, within ethnographic research theory is used as a means for understanding a specific phenomenon of interest and for qualifying findings.

Chapter 4

The Method of the Study

Given that the general aim of this research is to investigate the everyday encounters with the commercial break within a naturalistic setting, the ethnographic method with its principle of emergent design and acknowledgement of the importance of contextual factors seemed to provide an appropriate methodological approach. An obvious location for an ethnographic study on this phenomenon was the household setting. A household would for this purpose offer an excellent research site where the behavior in question would arise naturally on a daily basis, and where the members of the household would engage in a wide range of interpersonal exchanges. In the study two different sources of data collection was used, namely observations in the format of filming and group interviews. In striving to maintain a setting as close to the naturalistic context as possible, filming was chosen as a mode of collecting observational data. The households were filmed for two weeks. Moreover, group interviews were performed with the households to further the understanding of the phenomenon. The sources of data collection are described further in this chapter. Rather than focusing on one ethnographic site as in Hill's (1991) study of the homeless shelter or Arnould and Price's (1993) study of the river rafting expedition, the research attempted to draw on material from different households similar to Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) ethnographic study on the celebration of Thanksgiving.

Data Collection

In order to investigate the everyday encounters with commercials during TV viewing in a naturalistic setting with an ethnographic method, eight households in the northwest part of London were chosen for participation in the study. The selection is "intentionally biased" (Lindlof 1995, p. 126) towards "information-rich cases" (Patton 1990, p.169), which were deemed likely to disclose or expose the sense-making patterns and structure of a certain phenomenon, (e.g., television advertising consumption behavior). By purposive sampling, the chosen households consist of both families and other co-habitation constellations that also vary in age, socio-economic factors and size. This choice was made in order to select different kinds of cases with maximum variation to contrast against each other (Patton 1990).

Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects.

(Patton, 1990, p.126).

The sample size of eight households (consisting of 30 informants) was used because a "saturation level" was reached and patterns and structure had emerged (Buttle 1991; Zwaga 1992; Tedlock 2000). In the interpretive paradigm there is no such belief that a larger sample size always is better, since a greater number of informants which in turn means a larger amount of data might lead the researcher to sacrifice the depth of understanding in the pursuit of greater sample sizes (Belk et al. 1988). In contrast to methods drawn from logical empiricism, a sample can only be deemed sufficient as the study progresses rather than prior to its commencement. The 8 households are briefly described in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: the Households

Household names	Informants	Neighbourhood type	TV set	Additional TV sets	Self reported viewing habits
Adams	Michael, 35+, photographer Katherine, 35+, stay at home mum Joey, 4 Katie, 2	Apartments, Young Professional Singles and Couples	VCR Remote Control TV in living room Terrestrial	None	1-1.30 PM 4-5 PM 6-10 PM
Barnes	Ruthie, 49, administrative personnel Steven, 49, accountant. David, 21, student Lucy, 19, student Grandmother, +65	Mature Well- Off Suburbs	VCR Remote Control TV in living room Cable	4 additional sets: 1 in dining room, 1 in kitchen, 1 bedroom and 1 in old mother's room	Mon-Fri 7-12 PM Weekends 2-5 PM and 7-12 PM
Childs	Richard, 68, retired Margaret, 60, administrative personnel	Mature Well- Off Suburbs	VCR Remote Control TV in living room Cable	None	4-5 PM 7.30- 11.30 PM
Drummond	John, 33, electrician Laura, 29, stay at home mum Simon, 2, 5 Philippa, 1	No profile allocated to this postcode.	VCR Remote Control TV in living room Terrestrial	None	10-12 AM 3.30-4 PM 7.30-11 PM
Edwards	Robert 35, chauffeur Lisa, 33, marketing executive	Home Owning Areas, Council Tenants, Retired People	VCR Remote Control TV in living room ON digital TV in living room	1 in spare room, mostly used for Play Station	Mon- Fri 8-9 AM 5-12 PM Weekend 11.30 AM -12 PM
Ford	Melissa, 31, waitress and caterer Kevin, 2	Multi-Ethnic Estates, Severe Unemployment, Lone Parents	VCR Remote Control	None	3-6 PM 8-11 PM
Female Multiple Adult group	Friends living together: Anna, 25,	Gentrified Multi-Ethnic Areas	VCR Remote Control	None	7-7.45 AM 4-6 PM 6-12 PM

	media company Bea, 25, administrative personnel Celia, 25, administrative personnel		Teletext Terrestrial		
Mixed Multiple Adult group	All in their mid twenties, office workers from Australia. Friends and couples: Nicole, 23 & Pete, 24; Kate, 25 & Noah, 25; Jake, 26 & Sarah, 25; Jane, 26; Luke, 27	Wealthy Suburbs, Large Detached Houses	VCR* Remote Control Teletext Sky Satellite	None	Mon-Fri 6.30-7.30 AM 6- 11 PM Weekends all day *VCR in the living room while filming, but they never managed to get it to work together with the satellite.

All names are invented as to protect the anonymity of the informants.

The following criteria were used in the selection of households: Life Cycle stage, ACORN type (socio economic type), and other criteria (frequency and/ or amount of television watching, whether connection was possible between the filming equipment and their television set, number of television channels and mode of reception-terrestrial, cable, digital). The households, recruited via a newspaper, and through the process of word of mouth, were remunerated with a cash fee for their participation in the study.

The Centrality of the Television Viewing Within the Context of a Household

The television is a symbolic object. In the participating households the main or only television set is found in the living room. The living room in itself is a highly symbolic environment and is often regarded as the center of what constitutes the

concept of home (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). In each household the television set in the living room context upholds a significant position. The seating arrangements in the living rooms of the informants are comfortably furnished in a way that makes it possible for the household members and potential guests to have a full view of the television screen. It is common to have more seats available than the number of members that the household has. During the course of the two weeks filming, the informants exhibit regular seating habits. However, this changes depending on who is present in the room, and the type of viewing situation. Here is one example from the data:

Robert usually sits in the only armchair of the living room when he is watching alone. His wife Lisa sits on the sofa when watching alone. They usually keep these positions when they are watching together, however when they are in a more interactional mode they both sit on the sofa.

(Notes from the Edwards household)

Sociologists like Roberts (1995) talk about increased home-centeredness of leisure. This means that people spend more of their 'free time' on leisure activities that can be performed at home:

"Participation has declined in most forms of out-of-home recreation that can be replicated in or closely substituted by in-home entertainment. Cinema and theatre audiences and paid admissions at spectator sports events are in long-term and continuing decline. In Britain they have now been joined by out-of-home drinking. We are consuming more alcohol per capita than during any previous period in twentieth-century history, but there is less drinking in public houses and more off-sales for home consumption. Drink, film and sport producers have survived by gearing to increasingly home-centred markets. Most films are now made for television and video distribution rather than cinema performances. Live sport is played to televiewing audiences."

(Kenneth Roberts 1995 p.12)

This increased home-centeredness is likely to mean that more time is being spent in the prime room devoted to leisure activities, namely the communal domestic space where the television sets are found. The members of the selected households watch television on a daily basis. In all households the main television set is on during the peak hours 6-9 PM. During the weekends the numbers of hours devoted to television watching increase. Most of the social viewing takes place during the weekdays' peak hour scheduling as well as during the weekend. In some of the households, informants are also watching morning television on a regular basis. Both commercial channels as well as public service channels are watched (for an overview of the terrestrial television market in the UK see Appendix 1). However, the households differ in the proportion of commercial television and public service television that is being watched. In the course of an evening it is common for some kind of beverage or snack to be consumed in front of the television. In many cases, the informants drink a cup of tea in the time span between supper and bedtime:

Katherine is drinking a cup of tea while watching an episode of Friends.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

Many of the informants also consume alcoholic beverages in front of the television. The alcohol consumption goes together with a more relaxing mode of television watching:

Richard and Margaret are sharing a bottle of red wine in front of the telly.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

Even supper can be consumed in front of the television. In some households this happens when an informant is at home alone and thus is using the television as company. In the households with children, food consumption in front of the television

coincides with the viewing of a particular program (for example if they are watching a film and they need to eat during the film):

The young children Katie and Joey are eating fish fingers and beans in front of the telly.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

In the two house-shares, however, supper is by default consumed within the living room in front of the television. These households have relatively small kitchens without any kitchen tables. Moreover those households do not have any specific room designated for eating (i.e., dining rooms).

Researcher: Can you sit and eat in the kitchen? Do you have a table there?

Sarah: No. No. So if you want to eat...

Researcher: You never go up to the rooms to eat?

Jake: The lounge, the TV room is the communal room.

(Interview excerpt from Mixed Multiple Adult household)

The informants of these households could potentially eat their suppers in their respective room. However, they chose to have their supper in the living room where the television is regardless if they are alone or in company while eating.

Sarah and Sue are eating and drinking wine while during the break following an episode of Dharma and Greg.

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

In the present study the informants spend a lot of time in their living rooms and the presence in the living room therefore equals that the television set is on.

Approach to Observation

Patton (1990) identifies five dimensions of potential approaches to observations. These dimensions concern the role of the observer, the portrayal of the evaluator's role to others, the portrayal of the purpose of the evaluation of others, the duration of the evaluation observations and the focus of observation. In the present study the observer had the role of a mechanical onlooker, not even present when the actual behavior took place and therefore not taking an active part in the social interaction of the household (Figure 4.1). This is recommended when studying small and close knitted groups of people (Whiting and Whiting 1970).

Figure 4.1: Role of the Observer in this Study



The undertaken observations were neither strictly overt nor strictly covert (Table 4.2). Even though the observer was not present in the room, the households were aware that their living rooms had been equipped with a camera and a microphone, and that they were being filmed. It was hoped that the households would get used to, or 'forget about', the intrusion after a few days, because there was nobody around to actively observe them.

Figure 4.2 Portrayal of the Evaluator's Role to Others in this Study



Member checks (Lincoln and Guba 1985) later revealed that the informants didn't think that the presence of a camera had caused them to act differently. Because the installed equipment blended in with the living room there were no blatant reminders of the filming process in action.

Researcher: Obviously the cameras were with you for a while. Did you eventually forget they were there?

Melissa: Yes.

Researcher: Tell me about what happened?

Melissa: The first day I came I was really aware of it and to be honest the second day I kind of forgot about it.

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

Melissa says that she forgot about the camera after some time. Others, like Katherine, say although they were aware of the presence of the filming they felt comfortable with it and didn't let it affect their behavior.

Researcher: Was there a time when you forgot about the cameras being there or was it always conscious?

Katherine: Yes.

Researcher: Tell me about the time specifically, I mean was there a period when you completely forgot or very occasionally remembered or when...

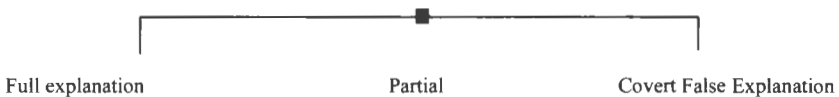
Katherine: It was towards... probably more at the end of the filming. Like in the beginning I was much more conscious of it.

After a period of time it had gone past I was getting less and less aware of it. Or sometimes I was aware of it, but I wasn't you know... didn't think about it...wasn't bothered by it. It didn't really affect my behavior.

In response to these insights from the member checks the decision was made to discard the 1st week's data. In the footage there are examples of people verbally fighting, walking around naked, drinking and using illicit drugs, and confessing to misbehavior. These types of actions can serve as evidence for the naturalistic style of inquiry, although the informants were consciously aware of being filmed and the effects of this knowledge might have constrained their actions to some extent. The method used thus can be acknowledged to provide a good, if not perfect, proxy for the naturalistic setting.

The households were recruited from a local newspaper article as well as via word of mouth. In the recruitment process interested parties were told that the study aimed to research consumption in a household setting and that each participating household would be remunerated for the inconvenience (£250 for two weeks of filming). The chosen households were not given a full explanation of the purpose of the research agenda, namely to study their behavior during commercial breaks, since it was thought that this would potentially affect their ways of behaving. In order to get access to the homes of the informants, however, the households were told that the area of interest of the research study was within the field of the sociology of the living room. This could be argued to be a partial explanation of the aim of the study (Figure 4.3). For ethical reasons no false explanation was given. Such explanation would also have made the follow up interviews difficult.

Figure 4.3: Portrayal of the Purpose of the Evaluation to Others in this Study



Each household was filmed for a period of two weeks. This would put the present study close to the middle of the duration continuum (Figure 4.4). Because people tend to watch television on a daily basis, and the interest of the study was people's advertising viewing behavior, an extended period of observation was needed. Filming periods of two weeks (one week of actual data) was chosen, since such an extent of time would at the same time provide sufficient data and allow access into the households.

Figure 4.4: Duration of the Evaluation Observations in this Study



The purpose of the study was to observe the behavior during the commercial breaks. One might therefore say that the focus of the observations is narrow. However, the behavior is not studied in a vacuum, isolated from the social life of the households, but rather in the natural context where it occurs. Looked at it this way, the focus of the observations takes on a broader, more holistic focus, even if it not aspiring to account for social life or social interaction at large (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Focus of observation in this Study



Filming and Verbal Reports

The fieldwork research, on which the thematic findings will be based, combines recorded observations of family viewing behavior with post-observational household interviews, and is modeled on the studies by Collett and Lamb (1985), Morley (1986) and Zwaga (1992). The multiple methods used in this ethnographic approach are:

1. Observation of the households by filming them.²
2. Group interviews (each of two hours) with the households.

Filming

Since the main interest of this study is to investigate the types of behavior that arise when a commercial break comes on in a natural environment, (i.e., a naturalistic setting), a non-intrusive way of observation was needed. Cameras, microphones and a closed TV-circuit (in a black box of the size of a normal VCR) were installed in the households. This equipment was adjusted to the television in the living room of the household. The actual recordings show the living room of the household as well as the TV-screen in one corner. This was made possible by a so-called "picture-in-picture unit". Each household was filmed during two weeks in late summer and fall 2000. It required participation by the household in the form of changing the tapes on a daily basis.

² With the possibility of filming comes the possibility to record in detail behaviors undertaken during a commercial break. In a way, this aspect of the data collection shows similarity to experience sampling, a quasi naturalistic method that involves signaling subjects at random times throughout the day for an extended period to ask them to self-report on the nature and quality of their experience (Kubey et al 1996). In experience sampling research respondents are asked the time of the day they were signaled, where they were, and what they were doing (as well as mentioning any kind of secondary activity they were undertaking at the same time).

Figure 4.6: The Setting of the Living Room



*Cameras, microphones and the black box (consisting of a video recorder) were installed in the living rooms of the households. The filming was programmed to start at the hours when the household members had indicated that they usually watch TV.
(Still taken from the living room of the Drummond Family)*

Zwaga (1992) used a similar approach in New Zealand. The main difference with his study is that he replaced the equipment of the households, and placed his own equipment in their houses. In this research the natural environment of the consumer was of great importance. Therefore their equipment was not replaced, and the equipment installed was adjusted to their television set. The households were also able to use their own VCR during the time of the filming. The households were filmed for fourteen days, during which they were able to get used to having the equipment (camera, microphone and black box) in their living rooms. The first week's filming is not used in the analysis. The assumption is that the household members would be used to/not aware of the equipment after a week, which would be mirrored in a behavior that more closely would mimic the behavior that would naturally occur in the case of no intrusion.

Verbal Reports

The recordings were followed up by post-observational interviews. The purpose of the interviews was thus to provide the 'emic' accounts of the behaviors during the commercial breaks (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Because the focus of the study is on the occurring behavior during a commercial break within a social setting, the usage of group interviews was considered to be a useful method to capture the 'emic' accounts of social interaction. In line with Hammersley and Coffey's (2002) reasoning that interviews, during which memories, opinions, events and experiences are narrated, also are to be considered as forms of social action it was thought that the sociality of the advertising viewing experience best would be captured if the whole household was gathered together to discuss the topic and provide their own contrasting, or similar, interpretations and meanings of shared experiences, events and the behavior in question. The interviews were held with all the households in their own homes during the fall of 2000. To conduct the interviews in the home environment gave important insights into the household dynamics, stimulated the conversations on the topic, and also made it easier for the informants to illustrate and physically exemplify their own stories, for example an informant could point out the position of her favorite armchair or show all the functions of the remote control while at the same time stating that her husband never got to understand how to use it.

At the interviews, all members of the household were present and after a short debriefing a selection of clips from their own viewing or non-viewing of commercials were shown. The interviews were driven by the informants who were seeing and hearing their own behavior. This kind of technique is known as auto-driving and is used to “enhance informant involvement and to elicit enriched qualitative information concerning events as informants perceive them” (Heisley and Levy 1991, p.257) since the informants try to elucidate and justify themselves due to the increased state of self-consciousness that they experience (Ibid 1991). The discussion started out from these video-clips. A form of open ended interviewing was used, where it was possible to maintain a productive interviewing context while at the same time allowing the informants’ comments to guide the direction of the interview. This is in line with the emic goal of the interview where primacy should be given to the informants’ contribution (McCracken 1988).

Open ended interviewing requires working from a general list of information that the researcher wants or some set of questions for which the researcher wishes answers.

(Denzin 1978, p.43)

As the study progressed, the list that guided the interviewing altered in its constitution in line with the emergent nature of the ethnographic method being used. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. After the interviews, each household were given a copy of the tape with excerpts of their own behavior, and questioned if they had anything to add to the interview. No informant opted to use this opportunity of feed-back.

On the Way to Verstehen

After finished filming, all the tapes of a household were watched and the commercial break episodes from each tape were then edited onto one tape. Some typical or

particularly interesting episodes were put on a separate tape (these were used during the interviews). All the commercial break episodes (in total 368 see Appendix 2 for the distribution) were then watched in details a great number of time, and then the observations were transcribed in detail. For every break the exact time of the break, the program the household was watching as well as who was present in the room and where each person was sitting were noted. In separate columns the synopsis of the ad, the movement and doings of each informant, and the conversations were carefully transcribed. Together with the interview data (discussed later), these protocols represented the basis for the data analysis. The protocols were very time consuming to produce (more than one and a half months per household). For each household a lengthy protocol was set up. The transcription of one commercial break, depending on for example the length of the break and the types and quantity of conversation, was between one and three pages long. The protocols vary in length depending on the nature of the household's viewing activity and other factors. These protocols were then read in their full length in order to get a sense of the particular households. Then the protocols were read over and over again to get a sense both of the parts and the whole. In a second stage of the reading, the observational protocols and the interview protocols were coded after categories that had started to arise (approximately 1000 pages all together). Then the tapes were revisited in order to compare the taped observations with the written observations and the interviews. A second researcher read and coded the observational and interview protocols using the first researcher's categories and then these notes were compared. The outcome of the two codings were consistent. Cultural themes (Spradley 1980) were then developed in order to serve and organize the cultural patterns or the "webs of meaning" (Geertz 1973). The themes thus represent the researcher's interpretation of the patterns found and form the basis for the shift from emic accounts to etic analysis, a transition that all ethnographic projects must go through. These cultural themes are in the following chapters being illustrated by "archetypal episodes" (Buttle 1991) from the study itself which will allow the reader to understand the behavior during a commercial break of the informants who participated in the study.

Trustworthiness

When conducting ethnographic research there are practices available to ensure the trustworthiness (credibility) of the inquiry. Following the methodological guidelines provided by Wallendorf and Arnould (1994) and by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), data were collected and recorded systematically in a natural setting. The films, interview tapes and film transcriptions made it possible to revisit the data sources in an organized way. This characteristic of the research design was an invaluable resource throughout the analysis process. The households were filmed for two weeks and then followed up with a group interview. The period of filming served as an extended observation by the researcher into the specific cultural context of the households. The group interviews served both as a data collection point, but also as a member check. The concurrent interview of several informants served to certify the experiential validity of the emerging recollections as well as to provide the added dimensions of multiple interpretations of the social phenomenon in question (Ritson and Elliot 1999). By watching a number of video excerpts of their own viewing the informants could provide clarifications and add a richer contextual frame to an episode. This procedure also allowed correcting possible miscomprehensions by the researcher, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the research. As a final step to ensure maximum credibility of the emerging interpretations, the informants were also given a chance to further comment the video excerpts as well as the outcome of the group interviews if they felt that something needed to be added. No informant took on this opportunity. The usage of both observational (films) and interview data from multiple ethnographic sites ensured a triangulation of sources. This triangulation, in turn, served to generate varying aspects of the behaviors and context of interest in order to probe the phenomenon. A second researcher coded the interview and observational protocols. This confirmed the stability of the initial coding scheme.

Chapter 5

Cultural Themes in the Frame of the Commercial Break

This chapter investigates the potential audiences for television advertising in a naturalistic context, and explores the behaviors that people engage in during the commercial break. In light of the limited contextual focus within advertising research discussed in Chapter 2, the objective of this chapter is to understand the lived experiences the potential audiences for advertising by re-contextualizing the ‘receiver’ of commercial messages from the asocial vacuum to the social world of everyday.

When analyzing the observational data as a preparation for the upcoming interviews, “relevatory incidents” (Fernandez 1986) of different behaviors that are exercised during the commercial break were encountered. These revelations were then probed during the household interviews in order to get the “culturally particular understanding to interpretation” (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, p. 490) of the behaviors. By analyzing the observational data and the interview data in part to whole iterations through a hermeneutic circle (e.g., Thompson 1997), patterns of behaviors within the frame of the commercial break started to appear and an understanding of the activities during the commercial break started to take shape. The behaviors that occur during the commercial break are: Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction, Tasking, Reading, Flicking, and Advertising Watching. The behaviors are documented in this chapter. A discussion of previous literature complements these descriptions. The behaviors are illustrated by archetypical episodes in order to

uncover different categories of behavior occurring during the course of a commercial break. The material presented is thus a distillation of a much larger empirical base.

Social Interaction

Television viewing consists of a repertoire of both solitary and interactional routines. In social viewing situations, there are two or more viewers watching television together. During the commercial breaks that occur under such viewing conditions, people try to initiate some kind of social interaction. These social interactions vary from mere physical ones, (e.g., caressing, hugging and kissing), to more complex social interactions in which more or less elaborated verbal exchanges are taking place. Such processes of social interactions are not restricted to the commercial breaks, but tend to be more prevalent and more focused than during the program breaks. The traditional sender-receiver model of reception does not provide a good explanation for the kind of behavior that takes place in a social context (Fiske 1990).

Let us first take a closer look at how the social condition is different from a solitaire condition. Zajonc (1965) proposed a drive theory to explain how the presence of other individuals can affect performance on goal-directed tasks. Zajonc imputes the effect of mere presence on performance to an increased level of felt arousal. Moreover, social facilitation has been explained with the argument that the presence of others creates either explicit or implicit demands on the person to behave in some specific ways (Geen 1989 p. 31). Contextual elements, such as the interaction partner, dictate the nature of the appropriate “roles” to be “played”. This was already recognized in the 19th century by William James who wrote, “a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him” (cited in Snyder [1987], p. 7). Any interaction time is only partly controlled by the individual and is dependent on both the actions of others as well as the established rules that define the appropriate turns of interaction of that particular constellation of people (Lewis and Weigert 1981).

In social cognition, group composition has long been identified as an important factor behind the effect of social context on psychological processes. Group composition can

affect social information processing (Levine et al. 1993, p. 591). Moreland and Levine (1992) propose that when situations are more highly structured and/or more group members share a common frame of reference, a narrower range of composition effects will occur, and they will be more powerful. Groups of friends differ from group of strangers in several important dimensions: interpersonal knowledge, interpersonal attraction and member diversity (Gruenfeld et al. 1996). These differences, in turn, lead to different processes and outcomes in joint decision-making, related for example to the way individual choices are aggregated to reach a joint outcome (Gruenfeld et al. 1996). In general, research on group decision-making and member familiarity confirms that level of acquaintance affects not only social interactions between group members, but also information processing within the group. This, in turn, suggests that familiarity with other individuals in a social situation affects not only communication processes in the case of explicit social interactions, but also individuals' information processing in goal-directed tasks. The mere presence of other people at the time of the potential encounter with television advertising will have an affect on the individual viewer's behavior (Puntoni and Tavassoli 2007). Moreover, both the composition of the group as well as the familiarity between viewers in naturally occurring social viewing within a household context will affect the actions taken by the viewers during the course of the commercial break. In the present study, we repeatedly observed that being together with other people at the time of the commercial break is constitutively different than being alone at the time of the commercial break. The informant Ruthie provides a description of how her behavior differs when she is watching television together with others when the commercial break comes on:

Researcher: Does it matter if there is someone else there when the ads are on? Would that be different?

Ruthie: Er... if there's somebody else there, I might be talking to them during the ads. I might put the sound off or lower it.

(Interview excerpt from the Barnes household)

When watching together with others the watching takes on a social character in which the viewing setting offers a convenient setting for social interaction (Lull 1988). The social interaction can be both physical as well as verbal in character. In the example below, Katherine turns affectionate with her husband Michael as to indicate that it is late in the evening and it is time to go to bed. They have two young children and although the episode of the sitcom *Friends* is ending at 9.30 in the evening, this is a late viewing experience for them. It takes Katherine a few advertisements before she starts initiating the physical interaction:

The children are asleep. Katherine and her husband Michael have been enjoying an episode of the sitcom *Friends*, one of Katherine's favorite programs. Katherine is sitting on the floor, leaning with her back on the sofa, and Michael is lying on the sofa. The commercial break starts and the couple continues to watch the program announcements and a couple of ads in silence. At the moment that an ad for a magazine called *Red Magazine* starts, Katherine turns away from the screen to the sofa, sits up on her knees, and then next puts her arms around her husband's back. She kisses and hugs him gently. Michael hugs her back. When the next ad comes on, Katherine comments: "It is approaching bedtime." She then moves up on the sofa and starts caressing him. During an ad for *Cadbury Crunchies*, Katherine stands up and walks to the television set and turns it off.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

The physical type of interactions varies both in kind and intensity, and occurs between household members that are lovers, or between parents and their children. The physical interaction is initiated by one person in a social viewing context as a way of getting the other person's attention, and can be seen as a non-verbal request for some kind of reciprocal action. It is possible, however, that if a household member initiates a physical interaction such interaction turns into a conversation of some sort between the interacting household members. Thus what starts off as a physical interaction transforms into verbal interaction. During most face-to-face conversations, the turn

Figure 5.1: A Time to be Social



During social viewing situations, the commercial break is defined as time for interaction. Lisa and Robert are hugging on the sofa (Example from the Edwards household).

taking is managed smoothly and effortlessly (Duncan and Fiske 1977). Moreover, one person's movements, during an episode of social interaction, are coordinated with the other person's (Bernieri and Rosenthal 1991):

It is 9.45 PM; Lisa and Robert are both sitting on the sofa. They are watching an episode of the drama series *Anchor Me*. They both have eyes on the screen, and are watching in silence. The commercial break starts with an ad for the Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society. At the moment the break starts Lisa gets into a playful mood. She turns to Robert and starts tickling him. He then turns his attention to her. Lisa coughs and then gives Robert a hug. Robert looks at his wife and says with an affectionate voice:

“What?” The next advertisement comes on. It is a Landrover advertisement [*The ad is staged on the savannah: A group of men dressed in khaki gear are eagerly anticipating the doors of a van to open. We are led to believe that the van is carrying some sort of wild animal, maybe a lion. The doors are opened and out of the van comes, not a wild and dangerous animal, but... a Landrover.*] Lisa and Robert continue to focus on each other. There are no eyes on the screen.

Robert says:

“I might be getting a scar.” Lisa responds:

“You shouldn't pick the thing off. Then you will have a scar...”

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

In the households, a natural thing to do when a commercial break comes on during social viewing is to engage into some kind of social exchange. During social viewing situations, the commercial break is defined as time to for interaction. This interactional time is stipulated by both general cultural norms, as well as special interactional rules that have developed within the specific social dyad of flat mates or family members (Lewis and Weigert 1981). Since the commercial break is an interruption from the chosen viewing experience, the space within a program or between programs is commonly regarded as time available for social exchanges. The unsolicited nature of the commercial break means that people in social viewing situations are obliged to turn their attention away from the screen and direct it to their fellow household members. It would not be appropriate to prioritize commercial

messages over social interactions with those around you. This means that when watching with others, to continue watching in silence can be used as a tool for avoiding contact (Bausinger 1984). This is much in the same way as when the husband uses the newspaper at the breakfast table as a way of shielding himself from his wife. This will in turn be interpreted by your fellow viewer as a sign of unwillingness to communicate, for example a sign that you are upset. To opt to not engage in social exchanges during the commercial break will thus be seen as a non verbal statement in the ongoing social processes of the household. In fact the meaning of informal interaction is originated in the communication that is going on, and the lack there of might even be regarded as sign of acute and significant deprivation (Kelly 1995).

People need to have satisfactory motives in order to engage in alternative behaviors other than social exchanges when the commercial breaks come on during social viewing episodes. Not only is there a social norm to engage in social exchanges during social viewing. People also have different topics or agendas that they wish to bring up during the course of an evening. Since the commercial break is defined as 'free time' at disposal, it provides people with an opportunity to bring up what's on your mind without risking to disturb the other viewers' program viewing experience. The commercial break becomes an arena where interaction and communication are not only allowed, but encouraged within the context of the household.

There are two different categories of verbal interaction that are taking place during the commercial break. First is Quotidian conversations. Second there is a category of more Frivolous types of conversations. Although these different types of verbal exchanges vary in their objective, any kind of conversation works as social glue within the household. Quotidian types of conversations are types of verbal exchanges that need to be undertaken in order for the household to function smoothly. These types of conversation could be of a phatic or task oriented function. One of the types of conversational interaction that take place takes on a phatic function, thus it is initiated as a way of sharing feelings or establishing sociability rather than for the communication of information and ideas. This type of phatic conversation is oriented towards the contact factor (Fiske 1990). It is the type of dialogue that might serve as an originator of other more important social interactions by keeping the lines of

communication open. Asking your friend, spouse or child about how their day was when you are sitting in front of the television fulfill the same function as asking an acquaintance about how she is doing or bringing up the weather while bumping into somebody on the street:

The commercial break comes on. Sue and Sarah are leading the conversation, while the others are listening. At the end of an advertisement, Kate walks in with an empty plate in her hand.

Sarah turns to her:

“I put it away for you.” (Referring to the dinner in the fridge)

Kate walks out to the kitchen and responds:

“Perfect, thanks!”

Sue then hurls back to the kitchen:

“How was your day?” At this point an ad for Hugo Boss comes on. At this point, nobody is watching the screen. Kate walks back in and sits down while saying:

“Quite busy, very busy... I only got out from there around seven.” At this point Sarah steps back into the conversation:

“Isn’t that amazing? I was a little busy, and the day went by quickly! I didn’t even have time to get on the Internet.” Kate continues on the topic:

“I didn’t have time to get on that either.” Then the conversation moves on to other things as the ad break continues...

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple household)

The above episode is an example of some kind of habitual courtesy. Kate is walking into the living room, with a plate in her hand, during a commercial break. Upon seeing Kate entering the room, Sue takes the opportunity to ask how her day at work was. When hearing Kate’s response, Sarah jumps into the conversation with an account of how her day had been. Sue and Sarah have been watching television for an hour or so, but Sue and Sarah have not yet exchanged the “how was your day”-ritual. In all the households this kind of conversation arises on a daily basis. It is based on the existence of a common subject that is familiar for all household members and as such serves as an instrument to maintain everyday discursive relationships.

Figure 5.2: Quotidian Conversation - Type 1



Phatic conversation serves to keep the lines of communication open. "How was your day ritual" in the Mixed Multiple Adult Household.

The other type of Quotidian conversation takes on a task oriented function. During this kind of social interaction, topics that require some kind of action taken by one or several household members are discussed. This type of discussions is all brought on with a specific goal in mind. This is not conversation for the sake of conversation. Rather it is action oriented. In the episode below Melissa, mother of Kevin, is changing her posture the moment when the program finishes and the break is about to start. The change of posture signals her changing behavior from the watching mode to the interactive mode. The subject that Melissa is about to bring up is one that arises on a daily basis, namely what to have for dinner. This brings on a negotiation about what to have which ends with Melissa and Kevin leaving the room in order to head for the kitchen. Kevin then returns in time for the next program to start:

Little Kevin, and his mum Melissa, are watching a children's program together. The program ends, and the commercial break comes on. At the moment the program reaches its end, Melissa changes posture by leaning backwards on the sofa, and says:

"Should I tell you what there is?" Kevin turns to her. Melissa continues:

"Do you want pot noodles?" Kevin not pleased with his mum's answer responds:

"I said pasta." However, Melissa does not seem too keen on the idea:

"Uh, I don't like pasta very much." Kevin continues to opt for his preferred choice:

"Good [pasta]." Then he continues:

"Sometimes dad got chicken curry." Kevin is at this point bored with the food conversation, and starts playing with a toy that he finds on the sofa while singing:

"Dudududu..." Kevin steps down on the floor. Melissa continues to discuss their supper plans:

"Should we have chicken then? Or do you want..." Melissa doesn't have time finishing her sentence before Kevin responds:

"Pasta!" Melissa tries yet again to stir him away from his choice of pasta:

"Do you want noodles?" Kevin is not going to give up his suggestion and insists yet another time:

"Pasta!" Melissa continues:

"I tell you what..." She stands up and walks out of the room while saying:

"All right, all right..." Kevin walks off after her saying:

“I like Pasta” The commercial break continues, but the room is empty. Kevin comes back running into the living room in time for the next program to start.

(Observational notes from the Ford household)

The process of making up dinner plans is not the only type of task oriented conversation that takes place. There are a great number of other kinds of activities that needs to be discussed and planned for within a household, for example the payment of bills, the cleaning and the childcare related issues. Anna, Bea and Celia recently moved into a new house. In the extract below they are discussing if their rental payments for the month have gone through to the new land lords. Bea finds that the commercial break the appropriate time to bring the topic up for discussion:

Anna and Bea are watching a soap opera. Bea is smoking a joint and Anna is preparing one. The ad break comes on, and Celia walks into the room. They are talking about the payment of the rents and are not watching the screen. Bea says:

“I think that [the landlords] are bloody stupid anyway. You know what I mean. It is their problem anyway.” Celia walks in and sits down on the sofa next to Bea. Anna jumps into the discussion:

“I am sure my money hasn’t come out. I’ve checked at my statement.” Bea responds:

“Mine has definitely gone through.” Meanwhile Anna continues to worry:

“I don’t think that mine have” Now Celia enters the discussion:

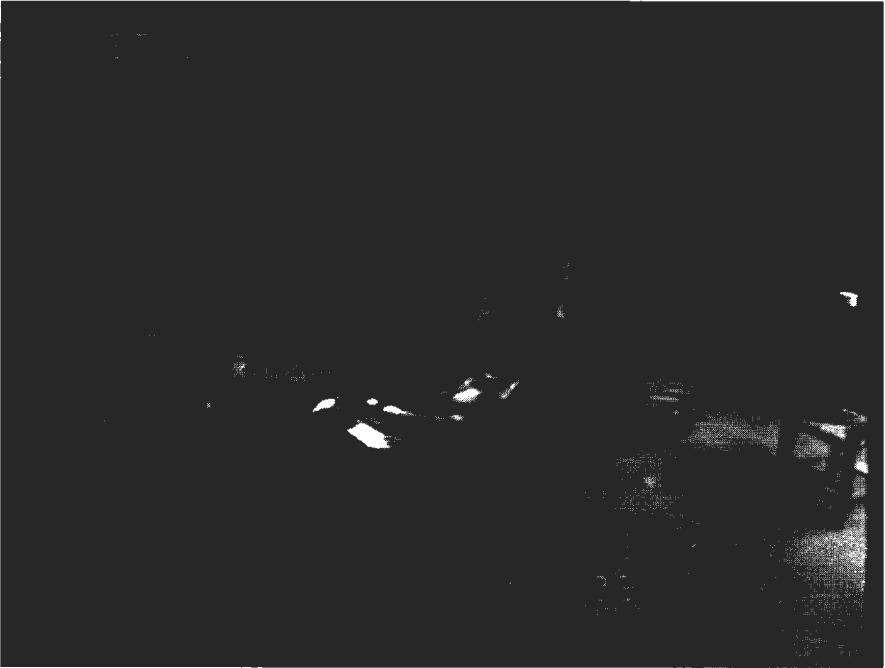
“I thought that they taken it out, since they asked for my bank details, they would sort it out as a direct debit, like out of my account.” Bea responds:

“I guess it is worth double checking then that they got all the details for next month!” Celia is agreeing with Bea:

“Yeah.”

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Figure 5.3: Quotidian Conversation -Type 2



Conversation that is task oriented as opposed to conversation for the sake of conversation. Melissa and Kevin are debating what they will have for dinner (Ford household).

Both the phatic kind of interaction, and the task oriented kind of interaction are needed in order to keep the household communication lines open, but are also required for the household to function properly. The types of interaction need to occur during some point of the day or week, and the informants happen to think that the program break is good time to deal with that type of interactions. On to the more frivolous category of verbal exchanges, these are verbal interactions that are undertaken for the sake of the enjoyment of the social interaction per se (e.g., gossiping, reminiscing and program related talk). The first type of this frivolous kind of verbal interaction is the sort of conversation that takes place during the break is that of small talking or gossiping about other people. Gossip can be defined as any kind of informal talk about a person that is not present in the room (Eder et al. 1991). The purpose of this kind of interaction is the exchange of tidbits of information that the informants need to make sense of and interpret what is going on around them. The gossip episode is initiated by one person, but it requires some kind of collaborative effort that takes the form of expansions, responses and clarifications on the subject (Eder et al. 1991). The Empty Nesters, Margaret and Richard use the program break to catch up on the doings of relatives and mutual acquaintances. In the example below, Margaret is curious to know about a mutual friend's holiday plans. Richard expands the episode by telling Margaret about an incident that their friend went through during a previous holiday:

Just finished watching a program on BBC, Margaret and Richard decide to watch the provocative show Eurotrash that runs on another channel. Margaret flicks over to the other channel where an ad for Malibu is playing. When the next ad for Vauxhall starts, Margaret mutes the sound and turns to Richard while saying:

“Did Roger say that they were going to Portugal?” Richard answers to Margaret's question:

“No, they are hoping to it with Lastminute.com...” Richard pauses briefly before he continues:

“That's how he went before with what's her name...” After another short pause Richard moves on:

“He got... he never been breathalysed before, and he got breathalysed.” Upon which Margaret responds:

“Did he?” Richard continues with the story:

“In Portugal, and he hadn't been drinking. You know how he is like?” The conversation continues until Margaret realizes that

Eurotrash has just started. Margaret puts on the sound again and they start watching the program.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

This kind of interaction is not oriented towards some action to be taken or a task to be performed. It is more a question about a need to ventilate what is on one's mind. Informants are also using the program break for narratives of personal experiences from the past. In this type of conversation the informants are reminiscing about times past. People can use personal narratives as a response to issues they are currently dealing with as a way of trying to cope with or understand them (Ochs et al. 1996). The narrative act can be resisted through minimal feedback, ridicule, denial and counter version (Ibid). Below Betty's account of hers and Bill's early years of marriage is resisted by Bill by his denial of the accuracy of the story:

Ruthie and Steven have enjoyed the company of Steven's parents, Betty and Bill, for a couple of days. It is late in the evening, and Steven's parents and Ruthie have been watching TV for the better part of the evening. An episode of the drama series Taggart ends and during the following break they all engage in a conversation. Nobody is turned towards the television screen. During an ad for Vodafone, Betty starts reminiscing on how she and Bill were disagreeing on whom should be responsible for the cleaning during the early years of their marriage:

"He thought he had a valet, a butler..." Bill tries to defend himself. The conversation continues until the break ends.

(Observational notes from the Barnes household)

The personal narratives during the program breaks can lead to that the attention is turned away from the TV-screen, and instead directed to the participation in the undergoing narrative. As during episodes of gossiping, the reminiscing type of conversation puts cognitive demands on the participating talker and listener, which means that the commercials that are aired during this type of exchanges are receiving minimal attention if none. Usually there is interplay of interaction between the teller

and the listeners of a narrative, thus the listeners are not passively taking in the stories rather they are actively taking turns in the conversation and become co-narrators. In the case when the informants are not resisting the account they repeat the other speakers' words and phrases, which are known as a lexical cohesion strategy (Eder 1988).

Another type of conversation that arises during the commercial break is program related. Characters, stories or themes from a program can be used by viewers as facilitators of conversation (Lull 1980). The kind of programs that potentially can bring on a discussion during the commercial break is dependent on the specific interests and likings of the viewer. However, the program has to create some sort of, positive or negative, program involvement in order for a program specific conversation to spark off. Situation comedies (e.g., *Friends*), reality soaps (e.g., *Big Brother*), and daily soap operas (e.g., *Coronation Street*) are the types of programs that have been the ignition for conversations in the present study. These are all programs that run on some kind of regular basis, and are featuring a number of main characters to whom the viewers with a relative ease can develop a relationship to. In the multiple adult household the girls and Jake are avid followers of the reality show, *Big Brother*. During the commercial breaks the household members can discuss what the contestants have been up to. The informants can be so engaged in this kind of program specific conversation that the advertisements are completely ignored:

Jake and the girls are keen followers of *Big Brother*. When the commercial break is about to start Jake starts telling the others a story about one of the *Big Brother* contestants. The ad break comes on. During the first ad which is a British Airways ad, Jake continues to tell his story:

“Everybody was talking about *Big Brother*, and then he was kicked out and it went downwards.” Kate responds:

“The thing is that you got to nominate people and the people in the TV-show might not have thought that he was nasty, so nobody was voting him out.” Jake continues to delve on the topic:

“He’s got kicked out and he’s got sponsorship deals and they reckon that he will make millions and he is hanging out with Brad Pitt and Guy Ritchie.” The conversation about the reality soap continues for another couple of ads before fading out...

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple household)

Experimental research on program context has, among other things, been concerned with the effect that program involvement might have on the subsequent advertising processing (e.g., Lynch and Stripp 1999; Lord and Burnkrant 1993). In solo-viewing situations the program involvement can be an important factor that will affect the potential advertising processing. In social viewing situations, however, a program that evoke strong involvement from the viewers is likely to lead to that the following advertisements are not even processed, since the viewers will be engaged in a conversation about for example “What did Rachel do to Ross?” or “Who do you think should be evicted from the house this week?”. When viewing highly involving programs in company of others, the commercial break is used by the informants as the time slot allocated for discussing particular features of the broadcast. In order to not disturb one’s own or the other people’s viewing experience, lengthy type of comments and discussions are confined to the break while shorter comments are expected during the programming:

Researcher: Why then the ads come on; I mean literally when the ads come on, your conversations really began, just like that one. So why during the ads, rather than the program?

Bea: With something like Corrie [Coronation Street] because we are Corrie Fans. There are certain things like when This Life was on. Everything would seriously stop, we didn’t talk through it. We’re obsessed, apart when we were shouting at the telly and telling Miles [One of the main characters in the drama series This Life] not to marry “whatsheface”, you know we get quite into... these programs.

Celia: OK, say we are talking about the weekend... and we still haven’t sorted out what we are doing, and we’ve just gone off on a tangent about something else and then you know, ‘Vera’s back on whatever’ [Character in Coronation Street] and then it’s the break, so yes...

Bea: ‘Are you going to ring Paul now?’, you know, or ‘Let’s talk this out, OK!’

Celia: We remembered what we were doing...

Bea: We will kind of go back to something that we have talked about before to try and bring it to a conclusion I suppose...

Celia: Yes, because that is our chance, isn't it?

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In the multiple female household, the informant Celia is even using the cultural term 'the chance' to define what the commercial break means for her household during hours of social viewing. A night in front of the television together with others means that at a minimum two different activities are combined in some way: watching the programs and interacting socially. The commercial break as such offer the viewers a good opportunity, or to use Celia's term a 'chance' for some more focused interaction. During social viewing, muting or lowering the sound is commonly used as a tool to facilitate the conversation, since sound can be perceived as a possible source of disruption in the turns of interaction. The reason given for the tendency to mute is that the sound is too loud during the breaks. Interestingly the tendency to mute is practically non-existent when people are watching alone, so it seems that "too loud" is constitutive of the sociality of viewing. Since the sound coming from the television can serve as to bring in the viewer into to the watching mode even though the viewer initially has made a conscious decision as not to watch the television screen during the duration of the commercial break, the use of the remote control in order to mute or lower the sound does serve as a manifestation of the importance of social interaction during the commercial break:

Researcher: So, is it different when the both of you are watching TV together?

Michael: Oh, Yes! I think so. Well actually, that is a good point because obviously if an advert comes...

Katherine: I usually turn down the sound down if the adverts come on, because the sound gets louder and I hate loud TV. Whenever the adverts come on I say 'Turn the sound down'.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

Figure 5.4: Frivolous Conversation



Conversation for the sake of enjoyment: gossiping, reminiscing and program related talk. In the Female Multiple Adult Household, Celia is even using the cultural term 'the chance' to define the commercial break during social hours of viewing.

The amount of conversation going on during the commercial break generally increases with the number of people in the room. In the large mixed multiple adult household; there is a lot more talking going on during the program breaks when there are more than two people watching television together. With a larger number of people involved in the social viewing there is a higher possibility that somebody would initiate a conversation. The informant Kate underlines that in a cramped room it is more likely that somebody would strike on a conversation of some kind:

Researcher: Do you think it would have a difference on the amount of ads or the way you watch ads if there are only the two of you, rather than the whole house being there?

Kate: If you are in a packed room you've got more chances to have a conversation.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

However, the composition of the group can also affect the behavior. Different social dyads create and uphold their own interactional rules. Depending on who is in the room the dynamics of interaction might change. The relative social statuses of the people interacting are governing the turn-taking in the interaction, and also its character. An illustration on the effect of the composition of the group has on the group's behavior is provided by the multiple female adult household where Anna's presence changes the character of what will happen during the commercial break. Through her work in the media industry, Anna has developed an interest for advertising. During the commercial breaks when Anna is watching together with one or both of the other girls, Anna might comment on an advertisement that she particularly likes or dislikes. However when Bea and Celia are watching without Anna, they tend to completely focus on their social interactions:

Researcher: You say that you talk through them more. Tell me about that, when Anna's not here you'll talk through them more, why is that? How does that happen in what sense?

Bea: Because Celia and I talk...

Celia: Constantly, and we just wouldn't, we are not interested in the adverts at all. See that as a chance to carry on a conversation that we had, we had to stop because the program came on before, maybe even between the previous ad break, I don't know, and then carry on with it.

Bea: And we talk about, pick up [on] a previous conversation or react to what we have just seen...

Celia: ...in a program.

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

We have seen that the presence of other people and the conventions that follows with social viewing can steer away the attention from the television screen at the time of the commercial break. The opposite can, however, also be the case. The presence of a viewer, like Anna, that for some reason is engaging in advertising watching might actually, bring in other viewers to an advertising processing which in turn can bring on an other type of interaction, namely advertising interaction.

Advertising Interaction

Advertisements can provoke some sort of reaction from the viewer. These responses occur both while people are watching alone, and in company of others. It happens in social viewing situations that advertising feed into the conversational processes. Television advertising provides an easy piece of conversation; it is easily available on the television screen in front of the viewer during the commercial break. Typically the responses to advertising are more prevalent, as well as more elaborate, when watching in company with others. Below naturally occurring advertising interaction will be explored, and the reasons behind the social uses of television advertising will be investigated.

Advertisements are full of devices designed in order to attract viewers' attention again and again (Lull 1988b). However, Scott (1994b) points out that although consumers might actively be seeking for information about a certain product being advertised, at other times they are in fact just observing, for example, the latest fashion and haircuts or are simply trying to cope until the program resumes. This means that advertising meaning is not supplied as a pre-packaged reality; instead it enters "our homes as raw material which we process and reprocess... within the social actions we perform" (Buttle 1991, p.10). In order to understand a viewer's response to an advertisement Scott argues that "we need a way of reaching out into everyday life, where some texts are read differently than other, where some propositions are resisted, where some authors have more authority than others, and where readers are skeptical and products are part of experience" (1994b, p.462). Ritson and Elliot argue that interactions between people "can potentially influence both the qualitative nature and quantitative magnitude of the effect of a particular execution on members of the target audience" (1999, p.273). Thomas (1992) stresses that consumer conversations take place in different contexts and that the conversational goals may vary accordingly. For example, consumers may discuss a certain product featured in an advertisement during a casual conversation with friends and family during an evening in front of the television or have a formal conversation with a sales person at a store. O'Donohoe (1993) argues that advertising is featured in family interaction as well as in peer interaction. Katz and Liebes (1985) discuss that conversations with significant others aids a viewer in choosing the frames for interpretation. Talking while viewing is important since a viewer can make use of group reactions and knowledge in the sense making process (Tulloch and Moran 1986). In the present study there are incidents of advertising interaction both during solo-viewing, and during social viewing. Below is an illustration of an advertising response that occurs during solo-viewing. The informant Lisa is actually talking out aloud as a reaction to what she sees on the television screen:

It is 18.56 PM; Lisa is watching the news while drinking tea and having some food. The commercial break comes on, and Lisa continues watching. Mid-break an advertisement for *NTL* comes on.

*The storyline is as follows: The advertisement is set in a cozy family environment. The viewer is led to believe that it is a loving family father that talks warmly about how getting Internet and Digital Television Access will bring about joy and social interaction between the family members. The ad shows how to use digital television for interaction and the Internet for shopping etc. Then the punch line is delivered. Now the family man is standing alone on a field somewhere in the countryside. The speaker voice says:
"Then get yourself as far away as possible!"*

Lisa watches this advertisement as the previous ones. However when the punch line is delivered Lisa looks at the screen in dismay, and says to herself:

"How awful!" More advertisements come on; Lisa watches them in silence...

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

In solo viewing a typical response is that of, in positive cases, laughing and, in negative cases, sighing. It happens that informants speak out loud even in solo viewing situations as Lisa did in the episode above. It seems, however, that more elaborate advertising interaction requires at least one, more or less attentive, conversational partner in order to be undertaken. Advertising related discourse can be seen as a particular variant of a household's conversational repertoire. A conversational repertoire is an index of terms and similes to be repeatedly used to evaluate and characterize certain events, phenomena or actions (Potter and Wetherell 1999). A conversational repertoire typically includes such varied discursive topics as relationships, personal experiences and popular culture (advertising included). The advertising repertoire comes into use during the viewing of commercial television. In the interview quote below, where Michael is being probed on his earlier response claiming that he and Katherine pay more attention to the advertisements while watching together, Michael starts to discuss the couple's advertising repertoire:

Researcher: So why it is that two people would pay more attention to ads than one do, do you think in your case? I mean compare yourself on the sofa on your own [and] when you are together. Why are you noticing ads more?

Michael: Well, we are both opinionated about consumer goods. Like Katherine is very [interested in] organic food or free range... meat and all this sort of things, both from a health and an ethical point of view. I'm really quite anti consumer goods. As I said, I don't like getting a lot of toys for children and I don't like... I am very Anti Christmas. Both of our cars look like tips, you know. We don't drive large cars...I suppose, which makes us critical of advertising automatically because we are critical of a lot of consumer goods.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

Viewers can also read the advertisements in the ways preferred by the advertiser and share this preferred reading with each other (Jacoby and Hoyer 1982). In this way they are consuming the advertisement in the way that the advertiser intended (Cecarelli 1998). Moreover they are also initiating a verbal advertising interaction about the preferred meaning:

An informative advertisement on the topic of the environment and energy comes on [*What you can do in terms of saving energy when you make your cup of tea. The information given is that you can save energy by only filling the kettle with as much water as you are planning to drink. The advertisement finishes with the slogan: "The environment, are you doing your bit?"*]

Robert and Lisa are watching the screen. When the slogan is delivered on the screen Lisa turns to Robert and says:

"Do you know that?" There is a bit of silence. The next advertisement starts [*HSBC, the bank. The ad features a stuffed parrot and a guitar.*] The couple looks at each other again as Robert answers:

"That's why I hardly fill up the kettle anymore!"

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Commonly, however, the viewers communicate their own reading of the advertisements. Mick and Buhl (1992) employs the term eisegesis to describe how ascribing meanings to advertisements can be a way of making one's individual

viewpoint public to others. At these times, viewers use the advertisement in an independent way from the intended objectives of the advertiser. The semantic ubiquity of advertising meaning makes it suitable for polysemic readings (Ritson and Elliot 1999). People want to share their opinions of what they find particularly funny, unrealistic, lame or even offensive with their co-viewers.

An advertisement for the carmaker *Renault* comes on [*The ad is set both in India, and at a rather posh dinner party somewhere in the UK. The ad consists of shots both of a rather adventurous couple of people driving around India while encountering different culture clashes for example a Holy Cow incident, and from the dinner party in the UK where the people gathered around the dining table are talking about the couple that are currently traveling around India.*] When the next advertisement starts, Paul turns to his girlfriend Anna and says:

“If I was at a dinner party where people spoke like that I would have had to kill them...” [Referring to the dinner party conversation in the *Renault* ad.]

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In cases as in the episode above, conversations about advertising are about features of an advertisement that would be considered to be peripheral cues according to an advertiser centered perspective (Petty et al. 1983). The logic behind that reasoning is that: “For example, a person who is about to purchase a new refrigerator (high involvement) may scrutinize the product-relevant information presented in an advertisement./.../On the other hand, a person who is not considering purchasing a new refrigerator at the moment (low involvement) will not expand the effort required to think about the product-relevant arguments in the ad, but may instead focus on the attractiveness, credibility, or prestige of the product’s endorser (peripheral route)” (Ibid, 1983, p. 315). If looking at it from an audience centered perspective instead, the viewer is engaged in a motivated act to watch an advertisement and a motivated act to engage in advertising interaction. What a viewer chooses to comment on is a central cue for her at that particular moment. What is considered to be a central cue for the viewer will however differ with the role that the viewer is taking on at the time of the reading of the advertisement. All different types of roles of readership are requiring

substantial cognitive effort, and one type of readership can not from an audience centered point of view be considered to be superior from another. An advertisement or elements of an advertisement can be used as topics in their own right, whereas at other times an element of a particular advertisement is used in order to initiate a conversation on a topic that a particular element of the advertisement somehow has brought about an association with. The type of association might for example be that one of the actors in the advertisement resembles somebody that you know in lived life. This type of advertising interaction will then change into social interaction, in which the particular advertisement served as ignition of the following conversation:

Bea: And it was when we were watching that... and seeing the fact that we all shut up through the rest of that ad for that car, and it is not like any of us are in the market for buying a car and I know we have seen the advert a zillion times but...

Researcher: Why does it strike you as weird?

Bea: Well it is weird... you know the thing started about my friend's boyfriend, but then we didn't say anything for the last of the bit of it...and normally you can't shut us up... We are all quite opinionated and what you have [referring to the video clip] and we didn't move on with the conversation. I don't know why, we were obviously all sitting there thinking 'Hang on, does he look like Tom the Wanker?' 'Yes, he does look like Tom the Wanker!'

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In order for more elaborate advertising interaction to take place, not only has there to be a person there to initiate it, it also requires an encouraging response from a fellow viewer. In this study the households varied in how much they engage in more elaborate advertising interaction exchanges. An illustration of a household where advertising interaction is seldom undertaken, or where an initiated advertising interaction is seldom responded to, is the Barnes Family. In the episode below, Ruthie's attempt to engage in advertising interaction falls to the ground because of her husband Steven's unwillingness to probe further into the subject raised:

Steven and Ruthie are talking. They throw occasional glances at the television screen throughout their conversation. An advertisement for a Sport's deodorant comes on [*A man at an office meeting, at home, out with a woman, watching television etc. The ad has the slogan "Sport on the brain, sport on the body!"*] Ruthie notices the ad, and says to Steven while looking at the screen:

"I don't think I've seen it before." Steven responds:

"It is promotion." Ruthie asks him to repeat what he said:

"What is it?" Steven says:

"It is just an advert for stupidity."

(Observational notes from the Barnes household)

There are different reasons why a viewer might get brought into the advertisement and from there attempt to initiate an advertising interaction based on some dimension of that particular advertisement. Music can act as a cue to bring on advertising interaction. Music in advertising is used in its symbolic form by advertisers in their persuasion attempts in the capacity as an easily understood part of the everyday cultural discourse (Scott 1990). Laura, a busy mum of two, comments on the fact that she often stops what else she is doing during a commercial break, when a song she recognizes comes on:

Researcher: You said before that you liked some of the commercials because of the music.

Laura: Music, good music would.

Researcher: Is it music that you recognize?

Laura: Might be that. Yes, it could be that. Like the one that used er... what else what that [starts singing] *in the jungle, the lion's jungle*, that's a really old song... I can't remember what it was... but it will always make me stop. And then also using a new song like that you have heard somewhere else, when they are using it or all the music that use, like Enya or anything really melodic or... like... Mikey [Laura's pre-school son] does it too if the music is very upbeat tempo... and then he is so disappointed when it ends. It'll be like oh...you know, because they love music.

(Interview excerpt from the Drummond household)

Another reason for why an advertising interaction might be initiated is concerning the novelty of the particular advertisement. When Michael and his wife Katherine opt to discuss an advertisement they tend to do it from a critical point of view. The couple comment that this is due to their anti-consumerist view on matters. According to Hirschman and Thompson (1997) this search for implicitly conveyed images often leads to a rejection of the advertisement. However Michael quite looks forward to watching an advertisement for the first time in order to slag it off:

Researcher: How would you describe how you watch advertising?

Michael: Well, I think if a new advert comes on, I normally watch it to see how bad it is. I think we probably comment more on adverts between us, sitting on the settee, about how awful it is or...more than anything else.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

Yet another reason is previous positive experience of the advertisement. Here the 'expert viewer' guides her co-viewers into and through an advertisement. When asked about if they have any favorite advertisements and why they like them, the informants all pick an advertisement with a humorous angle. Humor is a known enhancer of ad liking (e.g., Belch and Belch 1984). The informants use words as "funny" and "amusing" in association with "like" and "love". However, what is seen as humorous is not necessarily shared between the different households. Nevertheless within one particular household there seems to be agreement of the advertisements that are liked or disliked. Within a particular social location the interpretive conventions are shared (Radway 1984). In the illustration below, the informant Lisa has seen the advertisement before and thought it to be entertaining. At this exposure to the advertisement, Lisa makes sure that her husband also will experience the advertisement, because she is confident that Robert too will find the advertisement funny:

It is after 9 PM; Robert and Lisa are watching television together. The commercial break is on. Lisa starts to go through her paperwork. However, when an ad for *Supernoodles* comes on [A man dressed like a woman in order to be able to eat Supernoodles is dancing around singing to "I am every woman"], Lisa stops studying her paperwork, looks briefly at the screen before turning to her husband to say:

"This bit is so funny!" The couple now looks at the advertisement. First Lisa starts to laugh, and then Robert joins in. When the next ad is about to start, Lisa picks up her paperwork again and starts to go through it while continuing to laugh. She then looks briefly at her husband and repeats:

"Isn't that funny?" [Referring to the previous advertisement]. Robert looks at his wife and nods approvingly. He then resumes his viewing, while Lisa continues with her paperwork.

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Advertising is used as a means of communication. Advertising interaction can have a phatic function when it is used as a means to share feeling or establish a sense of community rather than for the exchange of information or ideas. Liebes and Katz (1990) compare the phatic function of television with that of for example the weather in that it is easy for everybody to grasp and as such can be easily shared. An illustration of this is when young Kevin below is using the lyric of the song in order to keep the communication line open with his mother Melissa who is in another part of the flat:

Four-year-old Kevin is alone in the living room when *That 70's Show* is on. The ad break starts and Kevin remains in the room. He keeps quiet for most of the break. Then an ad for the retailer *Argos* comes on. [The ad contains a song with the chorus "*What ever you want, what ever you need...*" However, during this break a shorter version of the ad, that does not feature the chorus, is shown] When the ad finishes Kevin sings:

"What ever you want." His mum Melissa hears him from the kitchen and continues the song:

"What ever you need." The ad break carries on. Kevin stays in the room, but is now silent again.

(Observational notes from the Ford household)

Advertising can be used for the sake of conversation. When viewers are exposed to advertising on the television screen the advertising related discourse is an easily accessible type of discourse (O'Donohoe 1993). Not only is the type of advertising related discourse easily accessible, but it is also a discourse that is not directly set within the complex boundaries of what constitutes the complex social relationships and social processes of the household (see for example Morley 1995). It is thus rather effortless on the part of the informants. A viewer can initiate an advertising interaction as a way to share one's opinions in order to seek reassurance from the other viewers:

Researcher: Well, why comment? Obviously you might find something funny, but it is the fact that you mention it: 'that's funny' or... you repeat it...

Jake: I suppose it's like you comment on anything. It's part of your life or so. It's not different from...

Nicole: It is a conversation piece so...

Jake: It is no different from seeing a nice car going down the road and you say 'oh, that's a nice car!' You see a nice ad and you go 'oh, that's a nice ad, that's a bad ad!' you know.

Sue: It's like seeking approval or reassurance. You sometimes know you want someone to say 'yes, I totally agree!' You know, it is quite often why you make a comment about a car, because you perhaps...

Jake: You like it and you want to see how other people think about it.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Why do people respond to advertising interaction? Since advertising-related conversation can be considered as another piece of conversation, the social norms regarding that a verbal statement requires some kind of reciprocated action apply, where communication is an example of a 'joint activity'. Feedback is an intrinsic part of the process by which meanings of messages are established (Krauss and Chiu

1998). If one person comments on an advertisement there is a felt pressure on the part of the other people present to answer in one way or another. Celia in the multiple female household talks about the etiquette involved in all kinds of conversation, even the advertising related ones, which makes people pay more attention to an ad because they do not want to appear impolite to the person that has been initiating the advertising interaction:

Researcher: So do you think in general that's true, that when you talk about a particular ad and one of you make a comment you end up watching the rest of the ad?

Celia: No, I think you do because if somebody says: 'Oh, this is really funny', or: 'look at that!' then you are going to stop and try and take something in and then either say 'No, you are talking rubbish'.. or, you know if you just said 'mmm' and didn't pay any attention to it, it's almost like it's been rude thing in conversation, like ignoring something somebody said, isn't it?

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Viewers take on different roles when engaging in advertising interaction. The roles observed in this study are the viewer as a reviewer, the viewer as a consumer, the viewer as a co-producer and the viewer as a player. The advertising interaction can be positive or negative. The first two roles are associated with both positive and negative advertising interaction, whereas the latter two overall are associated with positive advertising interaction.

First, in the role of the reviewer a viewer evaluate the advertisements from an aesthetic stand. Viewers are well aware of the commercial side of the advertisement (e.g., O'Donohoe and Tynant 1998), but they choose to look at advertisements in order to be entertained and to evaluate them in different conversations in both positive and negative terms.

Researcher: We mentioned talking about ads. Can you think of typical things you usually say when you are together watching TV and the ads come on?

Michael: Well, I mean we just comment on, we very, very rarely comment on the commodity that is being shown in the advert. We will just comment on the ad from an artistic, or policy point of view. What I mean is that most people do that with television in general don't they? It is a way... It is a way of passing criticism.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

Viewers can review the advertisements on their overall style that they have been executed in. They can also comment on some stylistic element in the advertisement, for example a certain clothing item or the looks of the characters featured in the ad.

Anna, Bea and Celia are watching television together. During a break in the middle of a documentary about ordinary people aiming for stardom, an ad for an insurance company comes on [*A man is standing on a parking lot talking about different ways of saving money. The solution is to call the company: "Call Direct line, you can save yourself a lot of money..." The advertisement ends with a loud beeping melody: Beepbeepbeepbeep!*] Immediately when the ad starts, Bea who is sitting in the middle of sofa and has Anna and Celia on her sides hurls:
"I hate this ad!" She then stands up and leaves the room. Celia mumbles:
"Yeah, me too... I've seen it too many times." She covers her face with one hand as to avoid watching the rest of the ad. Anna apparently couldn't hear what Celia just said, so she asks:
"You what..?" Celia repeats her previous statement:
"Seen it too many times..." Upon which Anna says:
"I don't think I've seen it." Then it is silent throughout the rest of the ad. Anna is watching the screen while smoking and Celia is still covering her face.

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Bea and her flatmates are commenting in evaluative terms on the advertisements that they are watching. The above example however is a rare moment where the advertisement is actually provoking Bea into physically leaving the room and Celia to cover her face in order to avoid it. The informants use words like "hate" or "love" when they are evaluating advertisements. The strong expressions of liking or disliking

Figure 5.5: Viewer as a Reviewer



The viewer can evaluate the advertisement from an aesthetic standpoint. In the Female Multiple Adult Household, Bea has just expressed how she hates the advertisement that is shown on the television. She even leaves the room because she cannot stand watching it.

can be followed by a reason for this strong emotion, as if people need to justify the emotional outburst. Overexposure is one reason given for the dislike of a particular advertisement. This wear out effect can even transform a well liked ad into something disliked (e.g., Kirmani 1997, Sing and Cole 1993).

In declaring an evaluative standpoint of a particular advertisement the informant is using the advertisement as a token of social exchange. One person's comment on a particular ad can lead to some kind of confirmatory response from the other people present. This kind of evaluative dialogue serves to reinforce the group's shared interpretation and the sense of shared identity within the interpretative community (Ritson and Elliot 1999). Within a household at the time of the reception of an advertisement that spurs an informant to make an evaluative statement, there seem to be a consensus regarding advertising evaluation, or at least nobody is openly challenging the opinions of others. In the present study there are no examples of occasions where a reviewing style comment made by a household member is being challenged by the other viewers.

In this study elaborate exchanges of more sophisticated interpretations of a particular advertisement in the way suggested in the Reader-Response type of research (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999 and Scott 1994) did not occur. Naturally occurring advertising interaction at the time of the reception is short in nature and confined to the duration of the advertisement interacted with. This is consistent with other observations of conversations "where long interchanges in which participants produce well formed sequential contributions that advance the conversation toward a goal in an ordinarily fashion are relatively rare" (Krauss and Chiu 1998, p. 47). The advertising interaction takes place during a fraction of an advertisement (i.e., the time it takes to say: "I love this ad!" or "This sucks!")

Researcher: What would you say to each other? Can you give a concrete example?

Robert: We tend to just sort of pay attention to the ad itself and see what is happening in them, you know, we might say afterwards 'Oh, that's funny!' or 'That's quite good' or 'What's the point for that?', you know...It is like 'Oh, yes, that's funny!'

or 'That was clever, how they done that?'. It is not really, no, we don't really discuss it in any real length after all.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

However, it happens that the advertisement that is spurring the advertising interaction is approaching the end when the advertising interaction starts. The advertising interaction then continues throughout the following advertisement leading to this particular advertisement to be ignored or at least not watched. Paradoxically an advertisement that captures the interest of the informants has the potential of bringing the informants out of the viewing, and thus obstructing the efficacy of the next advertisement in the advertising pod.

Another role that the viewer can take on when engaging in advertising interaction is that of the consumer. Although evaluating the advertisements from an aesthetic point of view is much more prevalent it happens from time to time that features or qualities of a product or service category, a product or service offer or a certain brand are being discussed. On these occasions the informants are reading the ads as 'consumers' (Scott 1994). The advertising interaction initiated by a 'consumer' can contain both positive as well as negative remarks. According to Scott this may happen if the viewer willingly assumes the role of being a specific reader of an advertisement by for example: "answering to certain social roles being called forth... sharing certain problems or afflictions... or simply experiencing a mood or an attitude" (1994, p.471). When taking on the role of the consumer in the advertising interaction, the viewer talks about the specific product category being advertised. Here the viewer talk about the product category in general terms without mentioning the specific product or brand that is being advertised. This kind of generic discussion can be in both positive and negative terms. An illustration of this is when the informant Lisa talks about the specific product category as something that she would consider to purchase. The energy bar in the below example is being advertised as something that is of great use for a person with busy and stressful lifestyle. Lisa considers that her job exposes her to a lot of stressful situations where she has to be quite flexible. Lisa has been considering buying a product of this kind for a while and seeing the advertisement makes her verbalize her purchase intention for a product of that product category:

It is in the evening and an ad break comes on. Lisa is lying on the sofa coughing. Her husband Robert sits in his favorite armchair. And ad for an energy bar comes on. [*The ad shows life at a stressful radio station and where the staff is eating energy bars to cope with the stressful situation.*] When the product is shown in the ad, Lisa turns to her husband and says:

“That’s what I meant to get, those sorts of things to bring to work.”

They continue to watch the screen. By the end of the ad, Lisa once more addresses her husband, who this time, turns around to face her:

“So where you go and I go... this goes with me sort of things.” To underline what she just said Lisa points a finger at the TV. Robert nods unenthusiastically:

“Mmm...”

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

The viewer can in the role of the consumer evaluate the commercial message. In this type of advertising interaction the viewer comments on something that has been claimed within the commercial message of the advertisement. Also this type of interaction can be done in both positive and negative terms. An illustration of this is when the informant Anna is rejecting the proposition made in the advertisement, because she feels that the advertiser is trying to trick her. Viewers might dislike the meanings that they interpret; not because they fail to process the information correctly, but rather because they are rejecting the proposition that they interpret is being conveyed (Scott 1994).

An advertisement for *Go Ahead* biscuits and chocolate bars comes on [*The ad is set in an office where the male manager is talking, and the female employee is munching happily on a biscuit and chocolate bar. The bars are presented as 85% fat free*] When the message in the ad is pushing for the fat freeness of the bars, Bea says to her boyfriend with a tone of matter of fact in her voice:

“It is 15%!”

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Figure 5.6: Viewer as a Consumer - Positive Evaluation



The viewer can read the advertisement as a consumer. The evaluation could be about the product category, the commercial message or a specific brand. Lisa gets inspired by the advertisement and talks to her husband Robert about meaning to buy a product in the energy bar category (Edwards household).

In the above episode Bea is rejecting the commercial message of the biscuit and chocolate bar being a healthy and low fat dietary option. It is not that she fails to understand the selling proposition, but rather that she uncovers “the mind tricks” of the persuasion attempt (Friestad and Wright 1994). In the role of the consumer it also happens that the viewer evaluates the product or service offer. Here the viewer is actually initiating a discussion on the specific product or service offer of the advertiser. Even this type of discussion can place the specific product or service offer in both negative and positive light. An illustration of this is where Jack is talking about the cheap offers made by the low cost carrier Go. Jack is motivated to process the informational cues as a consumer (McInnis et al. 1991).

Bea is having some male friends over one evening. They are drinking some red wine while watching TV. During the break Bea is cuddling up on the sofa with her boyfriend Jack. Jack kisses Bea. When an ad for an airline company comes on [*The ad has a song with the lyrics: “Go, go, go!”*], Bea starts to sing along while nodding her head to the rhythm:

“Go, go, go...” Jack then turns to Bea and says:

“Oh, do you know that they do 40 pounds return to

Barcelona?” Bea says:

“When..?” Jack responds to Bea’s question:

“From November to December...”

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In this study, on the occasions that the informants are discussing a specific brand to any greater length they do it in negative terms. An illustration of this is the example below where Bea starts off by mocking the stylistic execution of the advertisement. Then the girls move on to discuss the actual service offered by the restaurant chain that is being advertised:

It is late in the evening; Anna, Bea and Celia are watching Big Brother. During the break Anna and Celia are watching the screen, while Bea is looking down at some papers. An ad for a restaurant chain called *Harvester* comes on. [*A male speaker voice says: “If you ever been to a Harvester you know...” The interior and food of a restaurant outlet is shown.*]

Anna imitates the voice over:

“‘*You know...*’ that is absolutely shit..!” The girls laugh. Bea looks up from her papers. First she looks at the screen. Then she looks at Anna and says:

“I don’t know who was telling me this, but they [*the Harvester staff*] actually say all that stuff...” Celia giggles and says somewhat embarrassed:

“They do.” Bea continues:

“...When you walk in the door, they say ‘*Have you ever been to a Harvester?*’” Anna says disapprovingly:

“Uhh... I would have hated that kind of thing!” Celia starts to discuss the offering of a Harvester restaurant:

“Yes, this one, no...” She refers to the hard choice of deciding what to eat. Anna continues less forcefully this time:

“I just think that Harvester is really expensive.” Bea says:

“I don’t think I ever been to one. It is just the whole idea!”

Anna turns to Celia:

“But you had a nice dinner there the other week, didn’t you?”

Celia feels the need to defend her choice, since the other girls have slagged off *Harvester*:

“Yes, but I was really hungry.” Now Bea also tries to ease Celia’s discomfort:

“Pete and John said it was great. It is a standard joke between me and John. ‘Let’s go to *Harvester* and munch there.

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

When people possess knowledge of the marketplace it might foster scepticism towards advertising messages, since they then have a basis on which to evaluate them (Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). The scepticism is also an inherent part of the advertising literacy (O’Donohoe and Tynant 1998). People acquire persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994) through socialization, which helps them to identify how, when and why advertisers try to influence them, and people meet persuasion attempts with skepticism. Viewers can experience a discrepancy between the advertisement and the brand. Such discrepancies can be a basis of rejection on the part of the loyal or the knowledgeable consumer. Viewers might reject the message in the advertisement on the basis of being a consumer of that particular brand and disagreeing on or not recognizing how their brand is being communicated. An illustration of this is provided by the Empty Nesters Richard and Margaret:

Figure 5.7: Viewer as a Consumer - Negative Evaluation



Rarely, in this study, do the informants actually discuss the product or service that a specific advertiser offers in conjunction with the exposure of the advertisement. However here is an exception where Anna and Bea evaluate in negative terms the restaurant chain Harvester (Multiple Female Adult household).

It is around 11 PM; Richard and Margaret have just finished watching an episode of Eurotrash, and are now waiting for Big Brother to start. This time Margaret hasn't muted the sound as she usually does when the commercial break comes on. An ad for Sensodyne begins [*Showing a bowl of ice cream, then a package of Sensodyne, then a picture of a tooth in pain. This is accompanied by a voice saying: "I brushed my teeth with Sensodyne and the pain went away, when I used my regular toothpaste the pain would come back..."*] Margaret and Richard are watching most of the ad in silence, but towards the end of the ad when the statement "*I brushed my teeth with Sensodyne and the pain went away, when I used my regular toothpaste the pain would come back*" is uttered, Richard turns to his wife and says:

"If you are buying toothpaste, and you are using Sensodyne, why would you change back to an ordinary toothpaste?" Richard turns back to the screen. Margaret agrees with Richard:

"To make a stupid advert like that!" Richard nods in agreement:

"Yeah..."

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

Richard and Margaret are both users of Sensodyne and they don't think that the Sensodyne commercial is using the correct communicative strategy for their brand. In a way it is almost like they feel offended by what is being done to "their brand" as if they have appropriated the brand.

Another role that a viewer can take on in the advertising interaction is that of being a co-producer of an entertainment experience. This type of role is undertaken when the viewer is singing along with jingles or songs or mimicking or imitating catchphrases featured in the particular advertisement. As noted by Ritson and Elliot (1999) in their study of the uses of advertising amongst adolescents, the informants show an ease in interpreting, remembering and playing with advertising music and catchphrases (observational note from the mixed multiple adult household: Noah watches together with Sue. An advertisement for Budweiser comes on. Upon which Noah imitates: "Whaz'up!" [It is the catch phrase of the Budweiser campaign that gain notoriety and transcended into a catch phrase used around school grounds, office spaces and pubs] to his and Sue's joy.) In this study both adults and children sing along with music on numerous occasions. An illustration of this is provided by the three children below:

Little Katie, her big brother Joey and Charlie, her brother's friend, are all watching the children's channel CiTV in the afternoon. The children are sitting side by side on the sofa, and clearly enjoying both the editorial content as well as the commercial content. When an ad for a chewy type of candy called "*Chew it*" comes on, Joey takes the lead in singing along [*The ad contains a cartoon with a crocodile on wheels and a song with the lyrics "I like to chew it!*]:

"I like to chew, chew..." Joey is singing along with the music. Charlie gets inspired by Joey's actions. Joey and Charlie now both sing along in chorus. Both boys are laughing. Even little Katie is giggling:

"I like to chew it, I like to..." [*The ad finishes with a male voice saying with a Caribbean accent: "I like to chew it!"*] Joey then imitates the voice:

"*I like to chew it*" "*I like to chew it*". After Joey's final imitation, the children continue to watch the screen in silence.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

In the above episode the two 5-year-old boys Joey and Charlie start singing along with the lyrics of the song featured in the advertisement. In the end of the advertisement Joey even imitates the voice over of the ad that is repeating the slogans sans music, thus repeating the catch phrase. The boys are clearly enjoying using the advertising raw material in order to get nourishment for their creative outlets (O'Donohoe 1993), by consequently becoming some sort of co-producers of an act of entertainment. Other ways of showing appreciation of the music featured in the ad is to tap the foot or the remote control in order to mark the beat or the rhythm of the song.

Yet another role the viewer can take on is that of the player. In this type of advertising interaction the viewers use the commercial break in order to create a 'game board' for their game. The informants are challenging each other to guess who is the company or brand behind a certain advertisement. The notion of play is a fundamental trait of human nature and allows people to express for example their intellectual abilities (Pronovost 1998). Some do it in a more systematic way than others. The advertisements provide the necessary resources in order to undertake the game interaction:

It is 7.30 PM; Anna and her boyfriend Paul are half lying on the sofa watching an episode of the Simpsons. The program ends, Anna and Paul are staying with the channel because they are intending to watch the upcoming program which is an episode of Friends. Anna has her legs on Paul's. The commercial break comes on. Anna suggests to Paul that they should play an ad game:

"Let's check who can get an advert!" An Apple Mac ad is playing, Paul immediately says:

"Apple Mac." He laughs and turns to Anna with a smile on his face. Anna nods halfheartedly and says:

"Mmm..." Paul then says teasingly:

"Already..!" He refers to the fact that he has given the correct answer just a couple of seconds into the ad. Anna responds with an angry tone in her voice:

"Right, you have got a few points to make up." Paul questions the fairness of taking old game scores into account:

"That's hardly fair!" Anna continues:

"I thought we were 8-0. You are having a lot of points to make up!" The next ad starts playing. It is an ad for Clearasil. There is silence for most of the ad. By the end of the ad, however, Anna blurts out:

"Clearasil, oh..." She looks at her boyfriend with a smug look on her face. The next ad comes on. It is an ad for the retailer Homebase. After a couple of seconds Anna says:

"Homebase" Then she turns to Jack and looks at him triumphantly. Upon which Jack inserts:

"I don't watch that much TV." Anna sneers at Jake's explanation:

"Hmm..."

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Anna and her boyfriend Jack are playing the advertising game during the commercial breaks. They even keep a memory scorecard from previous sessions. The game has specific rules. It is about guessing the advertisements. At one point Paul is telling Anna off because she is shouting the name of a program that is being previewed:

Figure 5.8: The Advertising Game



When viewers read advertisements as co-producers or players the advertising interaction is positive by nature. Anna and her boyfriend are playing the advertising game (Multiple Female Adult household). The commercial break provides them with the 'game board' for their game.

Anna shouts:

“Big Brother!”

Paul reacts immediately to this:

“That’s not an advert! It is a program.”

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Viewers undertake the ‘advertising game’ in order to play for the sake of the interaction, which according to Holt (1995) is capturing the autotelic dimension of consumption. In the autotelic dimension of consumption, a consumption object like in this instance the commercial break is used as a means to socialize and entertain each other (Ibid).

Tasking

The home provides its’ inhabitants with both a vast amount of options of activities to engage in as well as it hordes everyday tasks that need to be performed in order for the household to function smoothly. During the course of a commercial break viewers can undertake different tasks. Some of the tasking activities take place within the living room setting, whereas other kinds take the viewer out of the room, where the television set is on, for parts of or throughout the commercial break (cf., Krugman et al. 1995). Tasking can take place as part of the fulfillment of basic needs (e.g., going to the toilet) or as part of the household chores that are undertaken during that specific time frame, not out of necessity but according to norms and rituals that have been agreed on explicitly or implicitly within the specific household setting (cf., Zwaga 1992).

Even when engaging in different leisure activities at home the household context provides a constant reminder of the household tasks that need to be undertaken in order for a household to function properly (Larson et al. 1997). People need to allocate the time available during any given day. For the hours spent at home, the time available is allocated between obligatory activities (such as housekeeping, child care and attending to personal needs) as well as socialization and recreation (Wilson 1980). In entering this multifaceted environment the commercial break encounters obstacles

Figure 5.9: Tasking



Tasking can be undertaken as a part of the fulfillment of basic needs or as a part of the management of household chores. Margaret and Richard devote the commercial break to take care of a mess that happened during the program (Childs household).

when trying to capture the attention of the potential audiences for advertising. A television program might distract the thoughts away from other household activities which are then let loose during breaks in the programming (Bunn 1982). The unsolicited commercial messages are competing for the attention of the viewer with a magnitude of other external and internal influences, some of them overt and some of them assumed. An illustration of tasking as a commercial break activity is provided in the episode below where Katherine is using the commercial break to fold the laundry:

It is 8.35 PM; Katherine is sitting on the sofa, dressed in a kimono, and is sipping her tea while watching an episode of *Big Brother*. By her side there is a laundry basket containing a pile of clean clothes. The commercial break starts with an ad for *Sensodyne* [*Showing the inside of painful tooth and then moves on to displaying the solution: A package of Sensodyne*]. Katherine takes a sip of her tea. Then she puts down the cup and reaches for a bag of candy. The second ad comes on. It is an ad for *Ice White* [*Showing beautiful girls with nice smiles. Music: "I like your smile."*]. Katherine opens the bag of candy and takes a piece from it. Then she puts the bag away next to her. Katherine starts to fold the laundry. An ad for *One2one* comes on [*Showing people in different circumstances like for example in the bedroom and on the balcony, when the mobile phone rings*]. Throughout the ad, Katherine continues to fold the clothes. The break carries on, and Katherine persists with the folding of the clean clothes.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

The household context (e.g., the pile of clean laundry) is an ever present reminder of the everyday issues that the viewers are surrounded by even during moments of television viewing. The commercial break might even spur off thoughts about what tasks that needs to be taken care of, since the break is punctuating the viewing experience. Some tasking activities, (i.e., endo-spatial tasking behaviors), take places within the room where the television set is on, like in the example above where Katherine is folding the clean laundry. Other tasking activities lead the viewers to leave the room for parts of or throughout the commercial break (Zwaga 1992). An illustration of when a viewer's tasking activities bring him out of the room where the

Figure 5.10: Exo-Spatial Tasking



Some tasking takes place within the living room. However, the tasking activity can take the viewer out of the room. Lisa is in the conservatory preparing for the arrival of her guests while the commercial break is on (Edwards household).

commercial break is on is provided by Robert. Robert leaves the room in order to vacuum clean the floors in adjacent rooms for the full length of the commercial break:

It is 9 PM; Robert is watching Stargate on SkyOne. When the break comes on, Lisa walks into the room in order to remind him about the cleaning up that needs to be done before the arrival of some guests the next day. On this cue, Robert exits the room and starts hovering in a near by room. Robert then hovers for the full length of the break. He walks back into the room, just before the program is about to start again. Robert sits down and starts watching the screen when the program comes on.

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

There are many different types of tasking that can be undertaken during the course of the commercial break. One type of tasking concerns matters of personal hygiene (e.g., going to the toilet and brushing the teeth), or personal grooming (e.g., putting on make-up and styling and brushing the hair). Some of these tasking activities can be undertaken within the room where the television set is on, whereas others, like going to the toilet, require the viewers to leave the room for parts of or the whole length of the commercial break:

Researcher: Any other examples?

Pete: Toilet.

Researcher: Tell me about it!

Pete: Well, if you are going to go, you can hold on for a quarter of an hour till the next break.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Another type of tasking that might be undertaken during the commercial break is work-related. This type of tasking can be performed without leaving the room where

the viewing activity is undertaken. The informants surround themselves with paper work when watching television. When the break comes on such viewers might shift their attention from the television screen towards the paper work. This activity is undertaken until the programming recommence. With the increasing number of professional occupations there has been a trend of work being continued to and from work, as well as at home (Jorgensen 2000). Steven's job as an accountant often leads him to bring home some paperwork in front of the television. During those occasions he is surrounded by piles of paper and folders. When the break comes on he changes from the viewing mode into the tasking mode. Steven is blurring the boundaries between work and leisure:

Steven is sitting on the sofa. There are folders spread out on the side of him, as well as on the table in front of him. There are even folders on the floor. Steven is watching a drama series called the Bill. Immediately at the moment when the ad break commences, Steven starts to go through his paperwork again, moving papers from one folder to another without even watching what is on the screen.

(Observational notes from the Barnes household)

Yet another type of tasking that can be undertaken during the commercial break is such that is concerning the preparation and collection of food and drinks. In the present study there are examples from all the households where the informants are using the commercial break in order to for example put the kettle on or uncorking a bottle of wine:

Researcher: What would be [the] more typical activities that you see either yourself or you partner doing?

Katherine: I do make tea, I know that.

Researcher: OK, tell me about that for a second. Go on and make tea. [Is that occurring] specifically in the advertising breaks?

Katherine: I would probably wait. I mean, if I was watching a program I would wait until the program came to an end and then I would get up and make tea or coffee or whatever...

Michael: It all depends if he's here [pointing at his son] or whether the children are here, I mean the children, one is asleep and the other one is at school... It is going to be something completely different from if they're in the house. Because there is going to be a ruckus in the bedroom or something and you are going out to sort that out.

Researcher: Tell me about that then. So if the kids are causing a ruckus how will that impact what's going on in the breaks?

Michael: Well, I mean I probably wait for the commercial break before I went and sorted it out. Unless it is urgent...(laughs)

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

In households with children, another type of tasking to engage in during the course of the commercial break is the activities that are related to childrearing. An illustration of this is provided by Michael and his young daughter Katie:

It is the children's bedtime. Michael has been watching a program while his little daughter Katie has been running in and out of the living room with a toothbrush in her hand. During the break Katie runs into the room again. She skips up to her dad and leans towards him. This time Katie has the toothbrush in her mouth. Michael says to Katie:

"Come on. Let me see your teeth!" Then Michael starts to brush her teeth. After brushing her teeth he says to Katie:

"Good girl! Take that back now, not in your mouth...not in your mouth, Sweetheart!"

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

In the episode above, Michael is watching television while Katie is running around on the carpet dressed in a nightgown while holding her toothbrush in her hand. It is Katie's bedtime, and she has been trying in vain to get her father's attention during

the programming. When the break comes on, Michael is however prepared to assume his fatherly responsibilities. Even in household without children there are a many household chores that need to be performed such as cleaning, washing, paying bills, food preparing etc. An illustration of such a household-related chore can be exemplified by the Empty Nesters, Richard and Margaret. The pensioner Richard is the one responsible for doing the grocery shopping as well as the weekday cooking. However, the couple plans their meal schedule together. In the below episode, the couple choose to devote the commercial break to accomplishing this task. In order to be able to perform this task, Richard has brought with him a pen and a notepad and put them on the table:

Richard and Margaret are sitting on their usual seats, Richard on the sofa and Margaret in the armchair, while watching television. Richard mutes the sound when the break comes on and picks up a piece of paper and a pen. He then turns to Margaret in order to go through what to put on the shopping list and says:

“Cheese straws, that was as far as we got...” Margaret responds:

“Yeah, what else..?” Richard continues to probe on the subject:

“I am doing, I have done Mexican Tortillas for tomorrow, Stuffed Peppers for Saturday. It is Sunday then... chicken or something?” Margaret tries to clarify what Richard means:

“I quite like that roast chicken, is that what you mean?” After a pause Margaret continues:

“Let’s think about tomorrow first...” Margaret and Richard continue discussing the items to put on the shopping list.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

When tasking is undertaken in a social context there can be a verbal exchange on what tasks that are going to be undertaken. In a household, decisions about how much time needs to be allocated to different activities and whose time should be allocated to what activities are made on an ongoing basis (Berk and Berk 1983). The commercial break offers the people in a social viewing situation an arena for such bickering or negotiation on household-related tasks. An illustration of this can be observed in the episode below where Robert addresses that time is need to be allocated to putting on

the laundry machine. Furthermore Robert is raising the question of who should undertake this particular task:

The program has just finished and the credits are shown on the screen. Robert turns to Lisa in order to address the household chores that need to be performed:

“Who’s going to put some washing on then?” Lisa clearly doesn’t want to do it:

“I want to have a bath!” Robert thinks that the activities could be combined:

“Why don’t you fill up the machine then?” Lisa responds:

“You have to start it!” Robert answers teasingly:

“Let’s see who is first!” Lisa fills in:

“The bath...” Robert stands up and walks out of the room. Lisa sits up, coughs, and then follows in her husband’s footsteps. The room is empty throughout the commercial break. Robert walks back in during the end of a program announcement and rearranges the throw and the pillows on the sofa. He walks up to the table to pick up the remote control. Robert then goes back to the sofa and sits down when the next program is about to start.

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

To engage in a tasking activity during the commercial break can be either planned in advance, like in the case where a viewer brings some work home with her, or initiated rather spontaneously. Unplanned things happen that require the attention of a household member. An example of such a rather unplanned tasking can be observed when Richard and Margaret are watching television while drinking some wine and snacking. During the programming Margaret happens to spill some red wine on the carpet. Instead of taking care of the mess immediately, Richard and Margaret postpone the tasking until the break starts:

The break comes on; Richard is watching the screen with the remote control in his hand. Margaret walks out of the room, and returns with a cloth in her hand in order to attend to a mess that was caused during the program. Margaret walks up to the table and kneels down in order to wipe the carpet. Richard puts away the remote control and walks up to the table to assist her. Richard wipes with some paper and comments on the mess:

“It has gone all the way there...” He then picks up a wine bottle from the table and walks out of the room. Margaret moves her cleaning effort from the carpet to the table. She then stands up and walks out of the room without even glancing at the screen. An ad is playing and the room is empty. By the end of the ad, Margaret walks back in again; also this time equipped with a cloth and continues to do her cleaning job. Then the program starts again. Margaret is still down on the floor trying to remove the stain. Richard walks back in and sits down. When he notices that the program has started again he calls Margaret:

“Come up!” Upon hearing Richard, Margaret stands up and sits down in the armchair. Both of them now have their full attention on the screen.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

When the program starts again, Margaret is still preoccupied with the cleaning up task. Richard, however, is indicating to Margaret that it is time to start watching the television again. Time and timing are two important issues when it comes to engaging in different tasking activities during the course of the commercial break. Certain tasks only occur at certain times, and are thus time-specific. However, what is a time-specific task for one person does not need to be so for another. Also due to different tasking habits and rituals the question when a time-specific task is undertaken changes between people. An illustration of a time-specific type of tasking is found in the episode with the informant Lisa. During workdays Lisa’s morning ritual involves watching television after taking a shower:

It is 8 o’clock in the morning; Lisa is watching the morning program, the Big Breakfast, before going to work. There is a blow-dryer lying on the side of her on the sofa. When the commercial break comes on Lisa switches on the blow-dryer and starts blowing and styling her hair:

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Lisa likes watching the show in the morning, but she needs to get her hair dried before leaving for work. In Lisa's frame of mind the commercial break offers her a good opportunity to combine the two activities of watching and drying her hair:

Researcher: How do the adverts play a role in that?

Lisa: The adverts would sort of, I mean the average time that I am actually in here in the morning is probably 8 'til half 8. That's it, tops. Last minute getting up, getting ready the whole bit, it's all quick in the morning. And then I am more aware of actually watching television rather than the adverts then. The adverts are just for me to watch while the hairdryer is going.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

Regarding the timing issue, there are two timing aspects that viewers need to adhere to. The first has to do with how one should time one's activity, (i.e., when to do the tasking). The second type of timing issue involved has to do with when to return if one has undertaken an exo-spatial type of tasking activity. Because the viewers are aware of the logics of commercial television they are adapting their behavior accordingly by postponing the activities to the time frame of the commercial break:

Researcher: Where do you go when the ads come on? Because we can see all of you leaving on the video [referring to a clip just shown]..?

Sue: It is like, you know, you are watching a movie or the program and you don't want to miss it. You got to time it to perfection, and you know that you can go out and get a drink and get a couple of biscuits or toasts or whatever and you won't go out there and make your bed or. So I'll go out now [to] put some toast on and come back in, and then I can go back and butter it [within] the same set of ads.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Informants can, when engaging in the kind of tasking that requires them to leave the room where the television is located, come back just in time for the program to start anew (Zwaga 1992). The precision of the timing of the return to assume the viewing experience is notable. Sounds from the TV, and especially differences in volume, are used by the informants as a guide for understanding the separation of programs from advertisements. The changes in types of sounds, (e.g., the signature music for a program), then serve as a cue when it is time to change back into the viewing mode again. During the interview, Melissa is shown a video clip of her in which she returns the second as the program starts again. When asked about it, Melissa explains that if she is into the program she is paying attention to changing sounds even if she is out of the room:

Researcher: No, but you came back at the right time.

Melissa: Yes, because I am waiting for the program to come back on again. I mean, I would say I am quite aware of that when I am in the other room if I am into a program. I will watch the program, and particularly Big Brother because then the music was so loud anyway at the start of every [part].

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

There are examples of informants coming back in time for the program to start anew in every household. In the case of Melissa, she lives with her son Kevin in a small flat where it is possible to hear the sound from the TV from every part of their living space. But this happens even in households that have much more space to their disposal. Katherine and Michael live in an old Victorian house where there is for example a kitchen, a bathroom and a hallway separating the living room from their children's bedroom. Even so when the couple insists that they hear the sound from the TV when they are out of the living room in order to for example resolve fracas between their two young children. However, when continuing on probing on the subject, Katherine suggests that in some cases one is guided by an "inbuilt clock":

Figure 5.11: Timing Issues in Tasking



There are 'timing issues' involved in tasking; When should the tasking be undertaken? When should one return from the tasking mission as to not miss the programming? The commercial break is on and the room is empty (Drummond household).

Researcher: How does that happen and how do you think you know?

Michael: Well, if we've gone out just because... in his [pointing at the son] bedroom and Katie is with him, then we if we hear a bit of the ruckus going on, then we go and sort it out and when we hear the TV start again, the program start again, then we come back, I guess...

Researcher: Can you hear the TV from the kids' bedroom?

Katherine: Of course, we do.

Michael: Well, I suppose mainly it is...

Katherine: You know that roughly, that's when that little inbuilt clock...

Michael: I mean, I think it is one of the strangest things about the way the whole advertising is done actually, that it is so regular. It's every 15 minutes for three minutes, or whatever, you do almost know when it is going to come on. I think if people would have to watch advertising a lot more of it was a lot more irregular.

Researcher: It is helping you out?

Michael: I mean you know in a certain program that there is going to be three commercial breaks...

Katherine: And you think: 'Oh, I'll go and get my tea in that one' and 'I'll go and get the pudding in that one'.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

The informants are stressing that in living with commercial television they have been socialized into coping with the disruption of viewing experiences. Through being exposed to similar types of breaks and structures of breaks on the different commercial channels the informants feel as if they have been taught the conventions of the break by the advertisers. It makes it possible for people to apply a 15-minute-rule. There is no need to break your chosen viewing experiences in order to attend to matters when an unsolicited segment of commercial content is coming up in only fifteen-minutes-time. Only very few things are so urgent that you cannot cope with waiting for the break to come on in order to see to them. The informants are turning

the unwelcome feature of the non-voluntary disruption of their viewing experience into a notion of ‘free time’, (i.e., time on their disposal). This incontestable feature of commercial television has been transformed by the viewers into an important pillar in the management of an evening in front of the television within a household context.

Michael: ...It is probably 20 years of TV viewing, and they have hardly changed the commercial break regime in that period, as far as I am aware.

Katherine: We have been trained.

Michael: Trained to not watch the ads, that’s a good idea isn’t it?

Katherine: Pavlov’s dogs...

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

Viewers are in possession of persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994). This persuasion knowledge implies that not only do people grasp the aim of the advertiser; they also have a developed sense of the general structure of commercial television. Due to the comprehension of the logics of commercial television when it comes to “how often” and “when channels are going for commercial break” and for “how long these breaks are going to last”, viewers have come to use more or less elaborate rituals in order to manage to allocate the tasking to the breaks. In Robert’s household meals tend to be eaten in the living room. Robert has developed a ritual that makes it possible to prepare his supper, eat the supper and at the same time not miss a single second of one of his favorite program. Due to the regularity of the breaks, Robert has a strict schema to follow in order to juggle with both his viewing activity and his meal preparation:

Researcher: What was happening in the evening and how was it different from the morning?

Robert: In the evening, it’s not really different really. It is basically if we are eating here or if we are out. When an advert

comes on we go out into the kitchen and make a cup of tea or start preparing food. Say for a Monday, I know that 8 o'clock I watch Star Trek. 8 o'clock on Sky 1 Star Trek comes on. At 8 o'clock I am in here and the first segment is only two minutes long and then they show the opening credits. Once the opening credits comes on I will go out and flick the kettle on, come back in, sit down and watch the first 5 minutes. Then it goes back to an ad break and then I go out and start the dinner. So if I am on my own I am... I then get all the stuff out, like the freezer, put it into the oven. By the time I come back, I know that this has now got to play for 15 minutes. There is going to be another ad break, now I can then go out and check. Now most of our meals take half an hour to cook, yes? So, I come back in, or go back out while the ad break is on, check that everything is not burning and [that] I have actually switched the oven on. Come back in, watch the next 15 minutes. Now I know that Star Trek is then half way through. So I then can go out, get the food out, and come back in here, to be ready for the second half of that program.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

All viewers engage in different kinds of tasking during the course of extended periods of television viewing. The types of tasking undertaken and to the extent that tasking is the behavior that one chooses to engage in during the commercial break vary between different viewers. Also varying are the feelings towards the commercial break as an arena for engaging in tasking. There are two opposing views of the commercial break as a tasking forum. One view is ascribing to the commercial break (in the light of tasking) as an opportunity creator. The other view is to ascribe to the commercial break the meaning of being a guilt reducer. Representing the view of the commercial break as an opportunity are the informants Ruthie and Steven:

Ruthie: Yes, I was probably going to make a cup of tea. And I probably said 'What do you want?' and he said 'Oh, a cup of tea'.

Researcher: Is that typically during the ads then?

Ruthie: Why?

Researcher: Why is that?

Ruthie: Because it is a break in the program, which I don't really, I wouldn't get up during the program and make a cup of tea. I would go during the ads because they don't grip me as much as the program perhaps.

Steven: You don't know what the program was!

Ruthie: No, I don't know what that particular one was.

Steven: Yes, I think I used to sort of like watching BBC, er... I used to like watching BBC because there were no ads. Maybe when I was younger, because ads interfered and I was always watching. I didn't get up. But nowadays because I quite like to get up and get a cup of tea or get something, I am happy when the ads come on, because it gives me a break or so. It's handy...

Researcher: It's handy. How do you mean?

Steven: Well, it is just handy if you want to get up and do something like go to the loo or you don't want to miss it [program], you can go during the ad. During the ads, sorry!

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

In the interview excerpt above Steven admits that he rather likes the commercial break because it provides him with an opportunity to undertake tasks without missing anything that he considers to be vital. Steven is even using the cultural term 'handy' in order to describe his feelings to the existence of the commercial break as such. This does not, however, automatically translate into the liking of the advertisements. Steven and other informants depict the commercial break as useful because it provides them with a time-out from the viewing experience. Not all the informants share this optimistic outlook on the break as an opportunity creator. For others, or at other times, the activity of watching television can be associated with feelings of guilt. For these people or at these times the commercial break is seen as the time for reducing these feelings of guilt or at least the time when tasks that one feels guilty for ought to be undertaken:

Researcher: When the program finishes and the ads begin. What happens? What do you think? What do you feel? What do you do?

Melissa: Well, I know exactly that the adverts is a break so I will, I mean actually thinking about it, I probably consciously even think that. You know like if I sit down to watch a program I would probably feel guilty because I know I should be doing other things. So therefore I think I would use the adverts and so [to] do those things so that I haven't wasted my whole night watching that program.

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

The meaning of the commercial break as 'free time' at disposal then seemingly does not only liberate the viewer, but also might serve as an obligation. TV viewing is by most people considered as an act of frivolity and idleness (Morley 1992). It is something you do in order to be entertained. Engaging in a television viewing activity is a primary leisure activity (Ibid 1992). The superfluous nature of TV viewing means that people that regard themselves as time-pressured might experience feelings of guilt while indulging in it. There is sense of guilty pleasure attached to television viewing to, but then the viewer has the potential of being immersed into to the programming which might serve as a counterforce to feeling guilty. By immersing into the programming the viewer creates a space for themselves (Radway 1984). The arrival of a commercial break, thus serves as a crude reminder of the everyday life of the viewer. This is in line with the observation that people that perceive their lifestyles as time-pressured often experience feelings of guilt due to the felt struggle of juggling between different activities and demands (Thompson 1996). On the other hand, there are activities within a household context that simply need to be undertaken: in an endless cycle in which even as the job is being finished the need to do it again reappears. There is a felt opposition between the necessary labor and the unnecessary play (Seabrook 1995). Melissa and the other mothers talk during the interviews about how they have been changing their viewing styles after the birth of their children. In Melissa's case she defines her viewing as a "waste" and underlines the passiveness of the activity in using the term "loll" as to describe the viewing experience:

Melissa: I mean, I don't think that I consciously think 'Oh I have to ring in the ads'. I don't think it is that kind of thing. But it is just

during the ads, I start thinking, I mean that is the whole thing, isn't it? I mean you are not drawn into the program so therefore your mind is back, so that is the whole thing about coming back. Or you know your mind is back to your thought process, because you're not sucked into the program. Well not sucked in but you're not drawn in and you are not absorbed.

Researcher: So you immediately start thinking?

Melissa: Yes, you're thinking of things that you should be doing 'Oh I should have phoned her' or 'Oh I should be doing that' or 'must do this' or 'Oh God, I forgot that', blah, blah, blah, you know?

Researcher: Does the feeling of guilt change how you react or behave during the advertising?

Melissa: Er, yes, I don't know. I don't know if it is the guilt, I think that it is just my life is a lot busier now. So prior of having Kevin, I mean it is all prior to having Kevin, before I had Kevin it was absolutely fine. You've got all the time in the world to do everything. So therefore you just sit and loll and watch TV for 5 hours and it's fine, and now I got him and I've got all the demands of that and my business and everything else, when I watch television I think 'God! I am giving two hours to this and I should be doing other things'.

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

Melissa explains that she is generally involved in the programs that she is watching, but that she becomes conscious of her feelings of guilt when the break is approaching. Thoughts of what needs to be done pops up when the focus is no longer on the program. As a way of alleviating these feelings, Melissa undertakes a task while waiting for the program to start again. It happens that she spends the break delving about what she has not been accomplished during the day. With such an intricate and symbolic environment follows the idea that 'time freed' is time that should be, if not wisely spent, at least consciously decided upon or devoted some thinking to. Engaging in watching the advertisements is a motivated act. However, within the boundaries of television viewing, the context of the household is there as a constant reminder of the life world and everyday life that we are immersed in. The commercial break serves as a catalyst for resolving the state of guilt associated with indulging in

watching programs when there are other things that need to be taken care of. The commercial break is also a moment in time to which the viewer can postpone activities and needs that do not require immediate attention. The activities or tasks associated with life world and everyday life occurs both within and outside the living room space. In both endo-spatial and exo-spatial tasking however, the viewer's choice leads to that less attention is directed to what is happening on the television screen.

Reading

Informants can also keep some kind of reading materials on beside them when engaging in television watching (Zwaga 1992). Moreover, in some households, depending on the television set, there is a possibility to use different kinds of television text services. It happens that viewers, at the time of the commercial break devote the pause from the programming to engage in different reading activities. In this kind of behavior, undertaken during the commercial break, the viewers switch their attention from the channel where the commercial break is being broadcasted to another form of entertainment medium through parts of or throughout the full length of the break.

Reading differs from tasking in the function it takes on. Whereas tasking is performed in order to fulfill a basic need or to take care of a household chore, reading is performed in order to reach some sort of gratification that is not necessary for the physical wellbeing of the individual or the functioning of the household.

People provide for media-use alternatives by having magazines and newspapers, subscribing to television text services, and having video recorders etc. Needless to say, this provisioning of alternative media uses does not necessarily mean that choice will be exercised but rather that choice is available (Anderson and Meyer, 1988). The act of reading is a motivated act and is undertaken by people for a purpose. The kinds of gratifications (McQuail 1994) that the informants get from the alternative commercial break reading are varying, although the activity is undertaken as a

Figure 5.12: Reading



People provide for alternative media uses by for example subscribing to television text services (intra-medium) or having a magazine beside them on the sofa (inter-media). People use alternative media in order to get different kinds of gratifications (Example from the Childs Household: Margaret and Richard are both reading newspapers during the commercial break).

substitute activity to the reading of the television broadcasting. The informants are using the substitute reading as a way of getting of information. Another reason for using the substitute reading is in order to get fuel for further social interaction. The informants can also use the substitute reading in order to obtain emotional satisfaction through being entertained. Below is an illustration of a substitute reading activity that is undertaken throughout the full length of the commercial break. This represents an archetypal illustration of this type of behavior. The viewer, however, might engage in alternative reading activities for part of the commercial break. The activity might be initiated at any point of the commercial break.

Betty, the mother of Steven, is visiting the house for a couple of days. She is sitting on the sofa watching an episode of her favorite soap opera, *Coronation Street*. The second the commercial break comes on, Betty immediately reaches for a magazine that is lying next to her on the sofa. Betty opens the magazine and reads it throughout the break. She is not watching the screen.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

In the episode above it is after dinnertime and Betty is watching *Coronation Street* by herself. Throughout the programming Betty is totally focused on the soap opera. In keeping a woman's magazine on the side of her it is apparent that Betty has a potential strategy available for the commercial break. In fact during the commercial break, Betty picks up the magazine and spends the break reading the magazine, thus devoting her full attention to the alternative reading material. Betty is seemingly tuning in and out of the viewing experience. The tuning out from the programming is guided by a clear change in both sound and image on the television screen signaling that the program is about to come to a break or an end. This is possible because, in fact, advertisements have to be clearly distinct from programming, and advertising breaks have to be announced in vision or in sounds (ITC Advertising Code and Rule of Amount and Scheduling.). The same distinct announcement of change of the character of content is guiding the viewer back to the programming again, when it is signaled that the editorial content is about to begin again.

Time is allocated as a resource where a person chooses among alternative pursuits (Gross 1984). In the light of the time frame of sitting in front of the television set the viewer has a set of alternative pursuits to choose from. The alternative reading act does not clash with the viewing of programs, but rather occur during the commercial breaks. This kind of reading is undertaken because people feel like they have some 'free time' to devote to an alternative reading act. As such it is different from the objective behind engaging in a reading activity throughout the programming. The principal activity for the viewer is watching the programs. By being the principal activity it means that it takes precedence over the alternative reading activity. The alternative reading activity is thus to be regarded as an interim activity for the viewer in attendance of the program to recommence. The catch, however, of this 'free time' is that it is brief in time, so activities embarked upon can not be too engaging since they otherwise will stir away the viewers from the viewing experience that they already feel committed to, namely the viewing experience. The ritualistic usage pattern (Rubin 1981) of different kinds of alternative media during the course of the commercial break is indicative of that this kind of reading activities symbolizes time-filling activities for the viewers:

Celia: We do read the paper, yes... in the breaks.

Bea: Oh, I do bring my Metro home. I think it's just a thing though, a lot of time I get so far on my train journey and I just want to read the rest of it. You know to find out what's on the telly that night, read the horoscope and sport.

Researcher: But why do that in the advertising breaks, and not when the program's on?

Bea: Because if it is a program I want to watch, I want to watch it...

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

The two main types of substitute reading activities available for the viewer at the time of the commercial break are intra-medium and inter media reading activities. The difference between intra-medium and inter-media alternative reading is that the intra-

medium substitute reading affects the viewing conditions for everybody present in the living room. In the intra-medium reading activity the reading is still taking place within the television medium. However, the form of the reading activity is different in nature. The intra-medium type of alternative reading applies when the viewer is using some kind of television text service. The substitute reading act can occur within the television medium when an informant leaves the broadcasting environment (albeit the sound from the television channel is still on in the background) and switches on television text service (called Ceefax in England). Most of the intra-medium substitution reading takes place during solo-viewing. However, it happens that an informant reads out loud what she is reading on the television screen much in the same way that she would read something aloud that she finds interesting in a magazine or a newspaper in order to bring in other people to the experience and to keep them posted on the subject:

The commercial break is on. Anna is sitting in the armchair. Bea and Celia are out in the kitchen. Anna presses the button in order to access the Ceefax pages. She then reads aloud to the girls in the kitchen:

“Naughty Nick Bateman has been kicked out of the Big Brother household.”

Bea shouts from the kitchen:

“Really..?” Anna continues reading to the others:

“...for breaking the rules.” Bea still from the kitchen:

“He had been writing down who he was voting for. So he was kicked out by Big brother.” Anna responds to Bea’s comment:

“Yeah...” (continues reading) So many fans tried to see Nick’s final moments that the show’s 24 hour Internet link kept freezing.

Bea from the kitchen:

“So do you think it will be on tonight?” Anna answers back:

“Yeah, maybe...”

(Observational note from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In the example above, Anna is checking out the entertainment news on the television text service while the other girls are in the nearby situated kitchen preparing their food. When Anna finds an interesting piece of news about the reality show *Big Brother*, she reads the information out loud so that the other girls also can get clued in

on the matter. As stated previously, intra-medium alternative reading activities tend to be undertaken during solo-viewing, where the viewer engages in the behavior in order to find out information about for example the financial markets, sports score or the latest news:

Michael: I mean something I do a lot, [Although] I am not probably, nearly as much as I used to... but I look at the financial markets a lot and so... if the ads start I'll go and look at the financial markets.

Katherine: But it is on the same channel, you can hear it anyway!

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

If the intra-medium reading activity is undertaken on the same channel as the chosen broadcasting, the sound from the commercial break will still be on. However, it happens that the favorite television text service is not that of the channel where the chosen program is being broadcasted. On those occasions engaging in the reading activity, means a change of channel throughout parts of or whole of the commercial break. In these situations the sounds from the commercials will not be heard; if not also this channel is going to commercial break around the same time. Chances are also that the chosen television text service is that of a public service channel:

Researcher: The situation, when it does happen? Tell me about what you might be doing. Tell me about the ads starting and what you might do with the text?

Steven: Well, if I wanted to do that, if I wanted to see the shares, I know I have to go up to 46. I prefer to watch BBC on the Ceefax. So say I am watching UK Gold, the ads will come on, I flick on to 46, get on the Ceefax and go through it as much as I could.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

If one viewer or a group of viewers chose to engage in intra-medium alternative reading in a social viewing setting there is an increased potential for conflicts to arise. By using intra-medium substitute reading in order to obtain some gratification within the social viewing condition, the individual informant or group of viewers do not only risk breaking the norms and conventions of the social viewing, but also potentially the actual viewing experience for the other people present.

A clash of viewing interests can lead to an increased usage of the television text services as a means to a substitute reading activity during parts of and throughout the commercial breaks. This type of intra-medium alternative reading has the potential to cause a lot of grief within a household, especially when then the television text service is not turned off at the time when the programming is about to start again. In those situations, the processes of power and politics (Morley 1986) present during social viewing within the boundaries of a household become apparent.

Researcher: Tell me about how they would do it in a typical break, when the ads come on...

Bea: OK, ITV's on. They see it is going to change, the moment that freeze frame that the last shot of the drama or whatever is on. They will flick over; I think it is generally BBC teletext they use more. The thing is that neither of us lives with our boyfriends, we are with them at the weekends. It is a Saturday, the football scores. Saturday afternoon, it's just like that all the way through. They drive us absolutely bonkers. 'Right OK, it is half time scores' All the way through, even if it is not like half time, Chris will be over trying to find out whether or not...

Researcher: What happens when the advert break is finished?

Bea: I shout at him!

Researcher: Tell me about it?

Celia: 'It's coming back. Quick turn it off. Turn it off now!'

Bea: It has got to [a] physical stage some of the time.

(Interview from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In the other main category of alternative reading activities, namely that of inter-media substitute reading, the viewer switches medium for the interim period of the commercial break. In this type of alternative reading behavior the viewer treat the break as an opportunity to catch up with other mediums that she has overlooked when prioritizing to watch a certain television program. This type of fill-in reading that the viewers engage in during commercial breaks is a different activity than the type of reading one might engage in at the breakfast table or while going to bed because the sense making premises of the reading is different. There are different types of possible inter-media alternative reading activities available for the viewer. A type of reading material that can be found next to viewers during the hours of watching is the daily newspaper. Reading the newspaper as a fill in activity is particularly suitable since the activity is often regarded as a time situational rather than a content activity (Jeffers 1975). The reading material is kept within an arm's length distance from the viewer on the sofa table, on the sofa, in the armchair, or even on their laps. It is this conscious provisioning of alternative media that makes the substitute reading possible:

It is 10.28 PM; Bea is watching an episode of Big Brother on her own while smoking and drinking a glass of red wine. Bea is sitting in her favorite armchair and is dressed in a bathrobe and has her wet hair in a turban. Bea reaches for the newspaper when the program ends. Bea starts reading the paper while still holding the cigarette in her hand. She has no eyes on screen when the commercial break starts...

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

The motive for reading will affect the interpretive strategy used and subsequently the motive behind the reading will affect the information that is taken away from the reading experience (Scott 1994). The purpose of reading will, for example, have an impact on the pace of reading and the details attended. Given that the purpose of the substitute reading is to have something to do during the break from the viewing experience, the kind of reading material preferred for this kind of reading is such that is more easily to access and requires less attention and involvement in the process of

sense making. Another type of reading material that suits this kind of reading activity is magazines:

Researcher: What magazine were you reading? What is it most likely to be?

Melissa: I should think it would probably be Hello.

Researcher: OK. Now to the point that is that it looked as if that magazine was there pretty much all the time, and that you were going back and forwards. Tell me a little bit about how that happens; how [why] the magazine is there in the first place? Where do you particularly read it? Take me through a typical example!

Melissa: Is this in relation to television or nothing to do with TV?

Researcher: Specifically related to the adverts.

Melissa: OK. Well, I would imagine because I got a small child that [is] my free time. I have I pack everything in to that free time. So that's the whole thing that I will probably come through with a magazine or with something that I perhaps wanted to read a couple of articles in, and then particularly because Big Brother was on. I would choose that over the magazine. But then I suppose it is that whole thing that maybe I would read half and then carry on reading it.

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

The informants are prioritizing the viewing experience over the substitute medium. Therefore the substitute medium has to be easy to get into as well as easy to get out from. The time for the substitute medium is clearly confined to the limited time of the commercial break. Magazines and newspaper are well suited for this specific purpose because of their usual layout (length of articles and usage of pictures) and content that allow the viewers to quickly take up, as well as stop, reading them. The conventions of these types of mass media mirrored in the way that its content is presented serves as a signal of certain master identities which makes it easier for the informants to grasp it (Anderson and Meyer 1988). Books are not suited for this kind of substituting activity. The activity of reading fiction engage the attention of the reader in such a

way that it enables the reader to create a time and space for themselves which allows them to deny their physical presence in an environment associated with demands and responsibilities, real or felt (Radway 1984). The activity of choosing to read a book in front of the television because you do not find the programming interesting is a different kind of activity than it would be if you choose to engage in a substitute reading during the commercial break.

Researcher: What do you read?

Margaret: I might pick up the paper, if I had not read it during the day. Not generally a book because I have to have longer [time] to get into a book.

(Interview excerpt from the Childs household)

An activity observed among the informants during the commercial break is to engage in crossword solving. While watching programs, the informants turn to the page of the crossword of the newspaper, and use the time available during the break from a program to look at the crossword, and try to come up with some answers. This kind of reading activity is suitable for the format of substitute reading, because although demanding in cognitive capacity it is easy to take it up from where you ended at a previous encounter with the activity (e.g., in this case at an earlier commercial break):

It is 22.13 PM; Ruthie and Steven are sitting on the sofa watching an episode of Jonathan Creek. When the program break starts with an ad from JMC [*A table and chairs on a beach with a female speaker voice*], Ruthie goes out to the kitchen in order to make them some tea. Steven on the other hand picks up the paper from his lap. During the next ad, Citroën Xara Picasso [*In a car factory a car is being spray painted in weird patterns while a song in French is heard in the background: "Je ne veux pas travailler..."*], Steven lies down on his stomach and starts solving the crossword. Steven continues solving the crossword for the following seven ads... No eyes on screen.

(Observational notes from the Barnes household)

To repeatedly engage in alternative reading activities during the course of the commercial break has a ritualistic dimension. It does not happen by chance, but rather by planning, and the behavior takes on the same appearance from one time to another. The ritualistic script (Rook 1985) identifies the kind of alternative reading activity used by a certain viewer, and also the behavior sequence in moving from the prioritized type of reading (the viewing experience) to the substitute type of reading, (the alternative usage of intra-medium or inter-media reading activities). The acts of reading newspapers and magazines, as well as engaging in crossword solving, tend to be found during solo-viewing. To read in silence during social viewing situations might be considered to be a break to the norms and convention of social viewing behavior. Reading a newspaper or a magazine, or solving a crossword can both be used in order to avoid interaction or be interpreted by the others as a way of avoiding interaction (Morley 1992). However, by attempting to bring in the co-viewer into sharing the reading experience, for example by reading out loud or asking for help with the crossword it is possible to balance the objective of the reading act with the pressures for sociality during the commercial break. However it can be risky involving others in your reading activity, since it might lead to you losing the control over it:

During the ad break, with the sound muted as usual, Richard is struggling with the crossword. At one point he hands over the paper to Margaret. Margaret looks at the crossword and says:
“Photo will be snap. Announcement...” At this point Richard holds out his hand clearly showing that he wants to have the paper back. Tired of waiting for Margaret to give it back, Richard utters:
“When you finish, can I have it?”

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

Zapping

During the commercial breaks, as well as during programming, people at times use the buttons on the remote control in order to change channels on the television set.

Commercial break channel switching takes place both during intra-program break (e.g., commercial breaks inside a particular program), and inter-program breaks (e.g., commercial breaks in between programs in one channel). Below the behavior to engage in channel switching during the course of a commercial break will be described, and the nature of commercial break channel switching will be unfolded.

With the diffusion of remote controls in the early 1980's a stream of research arrived with a focus on what effects this technology, that empowers the viewer by facilitating the ease and speed with which she might move around between different channels, might have on advertising processing and advertising reception (e.g., Heeter and Greenberg 1985; York and Kitchen 1985; Zufryden et al. 1993; Siddarth and Chattopadhyay 1998).

This body of research refers to channel switching as zapping or channel surfing, and the actual channel switching that takes place during the commercial break as commercial zapping (Zufryden et al. 1993). Moreover, it is common to state advertising avoidance as a motivation to engage in commercial zapping (Heeter and Greenberg 1985). Analogous with this view on commercial zapping as an advertising avoidance strategy, Siddarth and Chattopadyay (1998) argue that zapping can be seen as a measure of the viewer's motivation to watch an ad. Siddarth and Chattapopadyay (1998) suggest that important factors that lie behind if a viewer will resort to commercial zapping or not are: household category purchase history, repetition of ad, the pod's position, and the length and content of the commercial, but underline that zapping rate will vary significantly across households and situational variables.

The results arising from this stream of research are inconclusive: York and Kitchen (1985) claim that viewers are more likely to stay with the channel intra-program break rather than inter-program break, and that the first type of break therefore is far more likely to produce better audience viewing, perception and recall. On the other hand, Krugman (1988) instead argues that the commercial zapping is not an efficient strategy for advertising avoidance because it requires too much attention and concentration. This heightened attention to the television set at the time of the zap is,

according to Zufryden et al. (1993) likely to lead to more active processing around the time of the zap and to greater effectiveness for those ads. The existing body of research about commercial zapping takes on an advertising-centered perspective on the phenomenon. Moreover, it does not account for the consequences that social viewing have on the behavior as such. Instead it focuses on the drives of, and the effects on, the individual viewer. Below we will give an audience-centered account of the phenomenon.

During the inter-program breaks, (e.g., when a program ends), viewers engage in channel switching as part of a preplanned programming viewing schedule, or as program-scrolling activity that the viewers engage in in order to choose what to watch next. Naturally occurring channel switching during intra-program commercial breaks can broadly be divided into two different categories. One type of channel switching involves flicking through more than one channel, (e.g., “channel surfing”). An illustration of channel surfing can be found in the example below, where the informant Michael holds one hand on the remote control in order to rapidly be able to flick channel when the program ends. Michael flicks three times before he finds something else to watch:

It is 21.23 PM; Michael is lying on the sofa with one hand on his chin and the other one resting on the remote control. He is watching a program. When the program is about to end, Michael gets a firm grip on the remote control and starts flicking. Michael flicks through three programs, before ending up at a channel showing a sport broadcast.

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

The other category of channel switching entails a specific destination. One type of destination channel switching involves flicking to a predetermined program once the break is coming on. The other type of destination channel switching entails flicking to a replacement channel. Popular choices for such replacement channels are for example music and sports channels. An illustration of destination flicking can be

Figure 5.13: Zapping



Viewers use the remote control in order to switch channels both during intra-program and inter-program breaks (breaks inside and breaks between programs). They employ different channel switching strategies: channel surfing or destination flicking (intra-program) and switching as a pre-planned program choice or program-scrolling activity (inter-program). Sue is channel surfing during a commercial break (Mixed Multiple Adult household).

found in the episode below where the informants Steven and Ruthie are watching one program, and then opt for flicking to another program when the break comes on. Without asking his wife Ruthie, Steven engages in destination flicking. As to signal that this is not his permanent choice, Steven tensely holds on to the remote control. Misjudging the length of the commercial break Steven flicks back to the original channel twice:

It is late in the evening and Steven and Ruthie are sitting next to each other on the sofa watching a program called Jonathan Creek. When the break comes on, Steven reaches for the remote control and flicks to another channel where Eurotrash, a program with somewhat provocative content, is shown. Steven is still holding on to the remote control. They couple watch the program mostly in silence, but exchange some words. After a couple of minutes Steven flicks back to the original channel. However, here the ad break is still on. When Steven realizes this he flicks back to the substitute channel after a few seconds. After about another 30 seconds, Steven flicks back to the original channel once more. Again the commercial break is still on. An ad for *Starburst* is shown [*A guy is cleaning a swimming pool that is full of leaves. Change of scene: Now the pool is full of water and there are plenty of fruits on the side of the pool.*] Steven puts down the remote control and says:

“Oh, come on!” The next ad comes on. It is an ad for *Inland Revenue* [*It is in a cartoon style: A guy walks through an office.*]. Throughout this ad both Steven and Ruthie have their eyes on screen. During the ad, however, Steven sighs deeply and continues:

“Why don’t they show this on BBC?” Ruthie nods in agreement. Steven then looks at his watch seemingly annoyed. The couple continues to watch what is left of the break...

(Observational notes from the Barnes household)

In the category of channel surfing or serial flicking, there are different more or less elaborated flicking strategies involved. For some informants the channel surfing simply is a question of scrolling up or down with the arrow buttons on the remote control. For others the strategy involved in channel surfing consists of a selected and constrained number of channels:

Researcher: [Richard and Margaret are shown a video clip of Richard's behavior during a daytime break] you reach for the remote control... Where do you switch to?

Richard: Just going along. I think 'what is going to be on, on the other side?' I might go to 1, 2,3,4,5 and by that time I might have thought 'well there's nothing on there. I'll go back to what I want, right?'

(Interview excerpt from the Childs household)

Among those that tend to engage in channel flicking it is common to have a zapping repertoire in use, based on the idea that there are certain channels that are more interesting to flick to than others. The person engaged in channel surfing might stop for a longer period at one of the channels if something is catching her attention. At other times, however, the informant might be in a loop of flicking for the greater part of the break during which the same channels might be popping up on the screen more than once. It is not unusual to find episodes where informants are flicking more than twenty times during one single break. To engage in channel surfing during the commercial break, gives the viewer an opportunity of scrolling through the channel offerings and get a mapping of the existing viewing opportunities. The possibility to channel surf is thus an opportunity to get cued into what is going on elsewhere, and not an advertising avoidance strategy per se. Rather the informants feel that the unsolicited commercial break provides them with a couple of minutes to devote to other activities. Zapping is thus a question about trying to make the most of the time that the viewer has to her disposal, rather than an effort of trying to escape from being persuaded by the commercial messages on the screen:

Robert: I maybe know that I have got 2 minutes to flick through and find... and see what else is on...or I mean even though we have got TV guides, I never look at them. It is easier to just flick through and see what's on at the time. I mean I got to the 3 sport channels, I got 4 sport channels. I go and see what is on any of them. I've got 2 movie channels, a free movie channel as well so I flick and see what's on there. And then it's BBC1, BBC2...

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

In the category of destination flicking where the viewer flicks to a pre-determined program, the viewer instead flicks to a program that she enjoys watching but that in competition with the chosen program has lost out on some dimension. In this kind of destination flicking the commercial break thus provides the viewer with an opportunity to catch up with what is going on in the other program or at least get a glimpse of how the program might be like. In the case of the type of destination flicking that involves flicking to a replacement channel, the viewer uses the 'free time' at her disposal to go to a channel where she knows what she gets, for example music videos or sports broadcasts. Also in destination flicking informants have repertoires of possible program or channels that can be brought to use for the interim period. The particular destination that a viewer goes to varies according to what might be on, on the other channels present in this particular viewer's destination flicking repertoire, at the time when the viewing takes place. However, there is a hierarchy between the chosen program and the destination program or channel. Once the break ends on the channel where the chosen program is on, the viewer retakes her viewing experience. The chosen viewing experience has primacy in relation to the destination program or replacement channel. In the episode below, the informant Bea is opting for destination flicking to a game show when the news program that she is watching goes to break. Bea watches the game show for the duration of the commercial break:

It is half past nine in the evening. Bea is sitting in the armchair and is watching the news while eating pizza from a plate on her lap. When the music in the news is indicating that a break is coming up, Bea instantly reaches for the remote control that is situated right next to her. The break starts; Bea is holding the remote control in one hand and takes a few more bites of the pizza. After a couple of seconds Bea flicks to a game show on another channel.

(Observational notes from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Engaging in destination flicking, both program-specific and channel-specific is another form of rational use of commercial break. The viewer temporarily engages in something that gives her a more enjoyment than staying with the break. Destination channel switching, as well as channel surfing, are not avoidance strategies as such.

Only from an advertising centered perspective where the advertisements are in the focal point of the viewing experience is it a question of viewers consciously trying to avoid the advertisements. The viewer might express frustrations about having her viewing experiences interrupted by commercial breaks, but since the break will come on due to the stipulation of commercial television the viewer has adapted to the nature of commercial television as a consequence.

Although all the informants use the remote control, there is a divide between those who regularly engage in channel flicking as an activity as during the intra-program commercial break and those that use the remote control in order to change channels between programs. Among the informants that tend to engage in channel surfing or destination flicking when the commercial break comes on there is a tendency to reach for the remote control already when the break is about to start in order to be prepared for engage in the chosen activity. People that engage in intra-program channel switching as an activity can also broadly be fitted into the two different categories, channel surfing or destination flicking. However, a viewer might resort to using the other category of channel switching. Empty Nester Richard might serve as an example of this. Richard is retired and spends many solitary daytime hours in front of the television during weekdays. One show that Richard enjoys watching is called *15 to 1*. When the break comes on within this program, Richard destination flicks to the program *Ready, Steady, Cook*. However, even though Richard employs destination flicking while watching *15 to 1*, there are occasions when he resorts to serial flicking strategies instead. Richard argues that the reason why he engages in channel surfing is that, if his destination program is not shown, he has to adapt his flicking strategy accordingly. In this channel surfing Richard just uses the up arrow button in order to scroll through the channels that he has at his disposal. Within a household there might be a combination of channel switching types, (e.g., channel surfers, destination flickers, and those viewers that flick in order to change channels because of the viewing schedule). The interview excerpt below provides an example of two different types of channel switchers: the informant Sue engages in one type of destination flicking, namely replacement channel flicking, whereas the informant Jake has a channel surfing repertoire with different channels to go to when there is a commercial break on:

Sue: If I get [the remote control] I probably turn it straight to a music channel or I probably really watch them.

Researcher: How about you is it the same? What's your surfing strategy?

Jake: No, just flip channels.

Researcher: So take me through what happens, the ads come on what do you do?

Jake: 12, 14, 15... (Everybody laughs).

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Regardless of the viewer's channel switching style when and if the flicking will begin varies between different viewing situations. Channel switching episodes can start at the temporal space surrounding the beginning of the break. There is seemingly no clear cut point in time when people with an intention to engage in some form of channel switching realize and react to the fact that the commercial break has started. The informant Laura's somewhat delayed reaction to the arrival of the commercial break might serve as an illustration of this. Laura reacts mid-advertisement to the arrival of the commercial break, reaches for the remote control and flicks to another program:

It is 11.23 AM; the commercial break comes on. Laura is watching the screen. On the television screen there is an advertisement for *Hula Hops* [*A young man walking around with Hula Hop bags instead of hands*]. Halfway into the ad, Laura reaches for the remote control and flicks over to another channel where there is a black and white movie showing.

(Observational notes from the Drummond household)

People flick in the temporal space just before and after the start of the commercial break. Viewers switch channels when the credits are rolling on the screen, or when the

music is signaling that a break is coming up. Viewers also start channel switching the moment the first advertisement starts. Moreover, viewers, like in Laura's case above, can have a delayed reaction and start flicking when the first advertisement has been going on for some time. When a viewer that is all set to engage in channel switching will start flicking varies, for example according to program. According to legislation (see appendix) there has to be a noticeable change when broadcast move from editorial content to commercial content. This means that the commercial break has to stand out from the surrounding editorial content. Even so different programs end differently or go to break differently. The transition can be smooth or sudden. The transition can also be accompanied by music and this allows the viewer to predict the approaching start of a break. At other times there is a final punch line delivered after the credits have been shown. This means that even a viewer with her mind set on flicking from the moment the commercial break starts might have a delayed response due to a perceived ambiguity in transition from programming to commercial.

Not only will the style in which different programs go to commercial break affect the behavior of the viewer. Also the type of program is an important factor that will dictate when and if the viewer will resort to using channel switching as an activity during the commercial break. A viewer might make a conscious decision to stay with the commercial break, because she does not want to miss any single moment of a specific program. The types of program that might stop the channel switching from taking place vary between different viewers. An example of when a specific program affects the behavior of the viewer is when the informant Katherine is watching the whole intra-program break when the sitcom *Friends* is on. When seeing herself watching the whole commercial break, Katherine comments on what makes her decide to stay with certain programs and not with others:

Researcher: Take us a step back though, you are watching *Friends*. The *Nescafé* ad is the first ad on, what happens? Take us through it!

Katherine: I wouldn't flick channel because I know I want to see *Friends* again straight afterwards, and possibly I would then in that circumstance think that I might miss something. In a film it is different because it is long so it doesn't matter if you miss a bit.

But if you missed a bit at the beginning of the next bit of Friends, you know that you might miss something crucial that you wouldn't know [later on in the program] what they were going on about so, I wouldn't flick channels then.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

The program context does exert an influence on the potential audiences for advertising. Factors such as program involvement (e.g., Lord and Burnkrant 1993), program induced mood (Aylesworth and McKenzie 1998), and program liking (e.g., Murry et al. 1992) influence the processing style of the advertisements as the experimental research on program context have shown. In addition, the program context in naturally occurring viewing situations will also determine whether there will be any audiences for advertising available for potential processing of the advertisements during a commercial break.

Regardless of whether a household consists of regular channel switchers, channel surfers or destination flickers, all households tend to engage in inter-program channel switching in order to change to another pre-planned program or to check out, and evaluate potential viewing experiences. However, the program offering of a channel, (e.g., the programming), can lead the viewers to stay with one channel for the greater part of the evening:

Researcher: So how does that stop you from flicking during the ads?

Bea: Because, well for me, what's the point of flicking because I know that... Friends, Fraiser, Father Ted, Drop the Dead Donkey... whatever it has been over the years. I've know it is almost like it is a kind of a silent block, sometimes it has been BBC2, because of the Fast Show, but generally the whole night's viewing has been Channel 4. And so I haven't switched over.

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

Channel 4 is heavily branding their Friday evening programming as youthful and fun with several sitcoms and comic shows coming after each other. The younger informants are all talking about the Channel 4 programming offer. In the multiple female adult household, the informant Bea is even labeling the concept ‘the silent block’. In the multiple female household the girls tend to stay with Channel 4 every Friday evening. They even insist that this is a tradition that has been going on since their University years. On other weeknights, however, the girls consult the TV-guide in order to plan their viewing schedule. Only on Friday nights are they happy to deviate from having their own preplanned viewing schedule and to rely on the program scheduling of Channel 4. The ‘silent block’ illustrates a “folk” term for a temporal period extended over several programs in which the viewers are content with a specific channel’s offering and do not consider channel switching of any kind. That viewers regard a channel’s offering as a ‘silent block’ is every television scheduler’s dream. However, in the current media situation with an abundance of channels and fierce competition between the big contenders such devotion to a program block might be hard to attain. To summarize, not only the program context, that has been investigated within the experimental stream of advertising research, but also the programming context can influence whether the viewer will engage in channel switching as an activity or not, and, as a consequence whether there will be any potential audiences for advertising available for processing of the advertisements.

To investigate the influences of programming context on potential advertising reception and on advertising processing would call for a complex experimental design. However the interplay between programming context and program context needs to be addressed in order to gain a better understanding of the potential audiences for advertising. We move on to another factor that has been lacking attention from research on program context and commercial zapping: the social context that might influence if the viewer will engage in channel switching as an activity during the commercial break or not:

Researcher: Any programs where you would not specifically flick even when the ads come on?

Nicole: Friends, we would never surf if they were playing Friends.

Sue: No!

Researcher: What are the reasons for that?

Nicole: There is the risk factor (Everybody laughs)

Researcher: What is the risk factor?

Nicole: Well, you might miss... two seconds... and then the whole flat...

Jake: Come back late...

Nicole: You know you can't, no...

Jake: It is too risky to surf.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

The amount of channel switching, going on during intra-program breaks, decreases when there are other people present in the room. In the present study this was found both in the multiple adult viewing constellations as well as in the families. Viewers restrict their channel switching activities in order to avoid upsetting or irritating their fellow viewers. This is in line with the finding that individuals strive to make a good impression on others (Goffman 1959). Leary and Kowalski (1995) argue that people engage in impression monitoring most, if not all, of the time, even though often at a non conscious level: "Even when people do not appear to be monitoring or controlling how they are regarded by others (and, thus, might claim that they don't really care how others see them), they are, nonetheless, impression monitoring." (Leary and Kowalski 1995, pp. 31-33). The consequence of these concerns is that a habitual rule (Lull 1982) has developed which changes the behavior even among the most keen channel switchers. One informant in the multiple mixed adult household, Kate is referred to by the others as the "surfing champ" because she engages in extensive channel surfing when she is watching alone, holds her channel switching whims back when she is watching with others.

The ‘social’ risk involved in channel switching is not the only type of risk involved within the social viewing context. During the social viewing situations there is also a ‘personal risk’ involved. These two risks co-exist when an individual is watching together with others. Unfortunately there is a struggle between them. It is not possible to reduce both risks at one time. Instead the viewer has to weigh the risks involved in particular viewing situations. The ‘personal risk’ exists since the social context offers a situation of interdependence. This interdependence means that the individual needs “to rely” on the actions of others (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003). The ‘personal risk’ involved for the individual in social viewing situations arise when somebody else has the control over the viewing through the possession of the remote control. Even though the amount of channel switching goes down when several people are watching together, viewers can use the commercial break as a re-negotiation point since the viewing objectives of a group of viewers not necessarily are matching with each other. The commercial break is a space when conflicting viewing agendas can come up to the surface and cause unsettlement among a group of viewers. Under the condition of conflicting viewing objectives the commercial break becomes a zone for potential renegotiation of the viewing schedule, and possibly resulting in a downright shift in the control of the social viewing. In approaching the commercial break feelings of unease is popping up to the surface. Given the unsolicited nature of the break, household members can hardly deny other household members’ wishes to check out another program or the latest score without the risk of stirring up a scene. A way for the individual to control this ‘personal risk’ is to take control over the remote control. The actual physical possession of the remote control is a way of physically seizing control over the viewing experience:

Researcher: After the meal, you are watching another TV program whatever it might be and the ads come on now. What happens?

Margaret: Well, we start off by... I have the remote and I put it on mute, right from the word go.

Researcher: And are you happy with that?

Richard: Yes (laughs)

Margaret: Stop it! (Everybody laughs) What would you do... when you have a remote [control] you'd just go to another station, and we get hooked on something else and then it gets all bitty doesn't it? I have to select my programs. And I select them during the day and I hope that Richard will agree with them. Or if he doesn't agree then, the ones he wants to see perhaps I can tape, and then he can watch them the next day and that is generally how we view it, isn't it?

Richard: Yes.

(Interview excerpt from the Childs household)

The person that has the physical possession of the remote control is generally the person that has the control over the viewing experience. By being in charge of the maneuvering of the remote control the viewer is thereby the executor of the viewing decisions. However the viewer can reduce the 'personal risk' also by controlling through relationship. In which as Lull (1982) argues: "a rule-based practical syllogism can be used to illustrate choice-making activity that immediately involves television, but ultimately involves the cultivation of interpersonal harmony" (Lull 1982, p.71). We find an illustration of this in the episode below, where Empty Nesters Margaret and Richard have been watching a program on BBC. Uncustomary for this couple in this episode it is Richard that is having the physical possession of the remote control. However, it is still Margaret that is in charge of the viewing schedule, and when the program finishes Margaret orders her husband to flick to ITV where the next program that is on the couple's viewing schedule soon will commence. When Richard discovers that there is a commercial break on ITV, he turns to Margaret in order to get her permission to flick:

Margaret and Richard have been watching a game show on BBC. When the program is about to end Margaret turns to Richard:
"Three!" Richard flicks immediately to the other channel where the commercial break is about to start. Richard is still holding the remote control in his hand. He looks at Margaret in order to get an approval, and he flicks twice and ends up at BBC again where the contestants of the game show are shown while the credits are rolling. Richard turns to Margaret in order to comment on one of the contestants. When the following program

announcement starts, Margaret yet again calls on Richard's attention:

"Three now!" Richard obeys and flicks over to the channel that Margaret wants. There the commercial break is still on.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

In order to be able to control the 'personal risk' through relationship, the viewer needs to be stronger in the interpersonal power dimension. Interpersonal power is the degree of influence that one person exerts over another in a relationship (Lawler and Bacharach 1987). Since interpersonal power varies between different viewers, controlling the 'personal risk' through relationship is a weaker strategy than controlling it through the physical possession of the remote control.

Researcher: When you sit together, what do you do [with the remote control]?

Michael: Who has it?

Researcher: Yes.

Michael: Well, if we can find it, and they [the children] haven't hidden it, which is a normal problem, I should say that I have the remote more...

Researcher: How come you have it?

Michael: How come I usually have the remote? Well, probably I tend to be more interested in what's on, in general, so I will change the channels. There are a few programs that Katherine might want to watch and she knows that they're on. I mean, I never know when anything is on. She knows what time of the day and what date things are on and she will watch it then.

Researcher: Do you think when you are together that you do less flicking as well, is that the case?

Katherine: I don't do it, because I know that you [referring to Michael, her husband] go berserk if I do, so I don't flick. I don't have the remote control if we are together period (laughs).

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

The informants that have the physical possession of the remote control all provide rational explanations for why it is them, and not somebody else, that has keeps the remote control during social viewing hours. They provide different explanations for this, for example less involvement, inferior planning and knowledge of the program schedule, or technically inaptitude on the part of the co-viewer. Not surprisingly no one of the possessors state overtly that they want to be in control of the viewing experience. However, the non-possessors are hinting that they believe that the possessors have a need to feel in control over the social viewing hours.

Nevertheless, regardless of the reason stated for the possession of the remote control, the end result is the same. The possessor of the remote control is the final executor of the viewing experience, no matter if any co-viewer directly affects the remote control holder through relationship control. The remote control takes on a symbolic dimension, not only is it a practical device for channel switching and volume tuning, it also possesses connotations of power, and a sense of being in control. As Morley (1986) argues the remote control can play a part in the politics of home life. Morley tends to see the remote control as a display of masculine power that is “based not simply on the biological fact of being men but rather on a social definition of masculinity of which employment (that is, the ‘breadwinner’ role) is a necessary and constituent part (Morley 1992, p. 148). In the present study there is support for this role-based masculine power. In families where one partner is at home, and the other is working, there is an assumption that the ‘breadwinner’ is entitled to have the physical possession of the remote control. However, this masculine power exposition fits in both with female and male informants, and is not gendered by definition. In other households there is no such a direct power imbalance between the household members and the possession of the remote control is open for negotiation. However, there are also displays of gendered power exhibition:

Researcher: Tell us about the couch commandos and what they do when the ads come on compared to when they are not around?

Bea: They will flick, I would have said.

Celia: Yes, yes...

Researcher: Tell me about that. Take me through...

Bea: They are flickers anyway. They will watch something for 15 seconds and flick, flick, flick, flick. Unless there is something that really grabs their attention they won't stay with it. With adverts, there is no way. There is absolutely no way. I don't know of if it is a boy thing or whether it is... my brother does it, my dad does it. The moments the ads come on they will all be flicking.

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In the multiple female household, there is not much intra-program channel switching going on. However, the dynamics changes when one or more of the girls' boyfriends are watching television at the girls' house. The informant Anna refers to the boyfriends as the "couch commander", as she explains how the boyfriends like to be in command of the television through the physical possession of the remote control. This illustrates the frustration felt when different channel switching styles collide with each other. In every household there is an established norm for the appropriate conduct during social viewing hours. These habitual rules are only questioned when other viewers temporarily join in during social viewing hours. Otherwise they are not negotiated, but rather firmly established and regularly repeated (Lull 1982).

Viewing situations do become more complex as the number of people present in the room increases. The 'social risk' is judged as more important than the 'personal risk' as more viewers are gathered together around a television set. In fact, in increasingly social occasions the basic survival strategy of "the need to belong" (Buss 1996) gets increasingly poignant:

It is late in the evening. The group has been watching the sitcom *Frasier*. They watch the credits under silence as to not miss anything of the program. The commercial break comes on. The groups start talking. Some of them are preparing for going to bed. Nobody is paying any attention to what is going on the screen. During an ad for the daily newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, Jake who has been having the remote control next to him on the sofa stands up while picking it up:

“I am going to give you the power!” Jake is stretching out his arm with the remote control in his hand towards Sue. Sue leans away from Jake and hurls:
“I don’t want to have the power!” Sue clearly indicates that she doesn’t want to be responsible for the rest of the evening’s television viewing. The commercial break continues. The group keeps on talking.

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

In the literature focusing on family viewing (see Morley 1992 for an overview), and the dynamics of power distribution between family members, it is assumed that having the control over the remote control is always positive, as well as sought after by the different individual viewers in a viewing constellation. However, when looking at viewing constellations where the people are tied together by friendship or flat share bonds rather than by some sort of family ties, the picture that arises is somewhat different in nature. In fact, in the multiple mixed adult household, the household members have even coined and use regularly the symbolic cultural term ‘power’ for having the physical possession of the remote control. The connotation of the power in more complex social viewing situations is more complicated for the viewers of such viewing constellations than in family viewing. Firstly, the viewer with the physical possession of the remote control feels responsible for the whole group’s viewing experience. This is a burden that is not taken on easily. Secondly, the physical possession of the remote control, does in more complex social viewing situations in no way imply that the possessor is actually free to use the remote control as she pleases. The person in charge of the remote control has to take her fellow viewers’ wishes into account as well as adhere to the code of conduct during the commercial break which in turn is restricting the channel switching. In more complex social viewing situations the cons outweighs the pros for the person being ‘in command’. Associated with being the one in possession of the remote control comes more responsibility for the situation, rather than actual control over the situation, which creates as a consequence a stress and worries. The remote control holder becomes captive of the viewing decisions. It is understandable that few volunteer to be the one ‘in charge’ in the more complex social viewing situations:

Kate: Living in such a big place, some one has the power. Basically it's...

Joe: And you don't want the power. Because there is one thing on that I'd watch that no one else would like to watch.

Nicole: It is hard to keep six people happy, while you watch television.

Researcher: So how do you do? How do you work it out?

Sue: Whoever's got the remote has the power basically. I mean so you can basically surf. I mean there is a bit of a consensus of everyone's watching the *Simpsons* for example.

Kate: If someone is like watching the program and everyone is happy then that's fine, but if sort of nothing is on then everybody's trying to get rid of the remote. I don't want it.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Advertising Watching

It happens that viewers watch the television screen for parts of, or throughout the full length of, the commercial break. In this study watching is defined as having both eyes facing the direction of the television screen. Below the behavior to engage in advertising viewing during the course of the commercial break will be probed, and the nature of advertising viewing investigated.

Naturally occurring advertising viewing has not gained a lot of attention within the field of consumer research (nor has naturally occurring television viewing for that matter). One possible reason for this, as O'Guinn and Shrum comment, is that: "watching television is so common that we may simply be too immersed to easily observe its influence" (1997, p. 279). Scott (1994b), however, argues that the image of viewers as actively seeking for information about the product should be complemented with a formulation of viewers as observing, for example the latest fashion or haircuts, or simply as trying to cope until the programming starts again.

Within the field of cultural studies, naturally occurring television viewing has been studied. However, naturally occurring advertising viewing has not been a focal point of this kind of research. Cultural studies research has broadly identified three different cycles of viewing: relatively focused viewing, monitoring and idling (Lindlof et al. 1988). Not even in the relatively focused viewing cycles is the full attention directed to what is happening on the television screen, which means that the notion of attentive viewing is a relative concept (Lull 1988b). In monitoring the television viewing activity is the secondary source of interest, while the viewer at the same time is engaged in another activity. Idling on the other hand takes place in between assignments, where the individual is temporarily, and unintentionally, engaged in the viewing situation. Even if viewers of television are engaging in a relatively focused kind of viewing, these television audiences are not passive consumers but rather as Morley argues: “active in all kinds of ways- making critical/oppositional readings of dominant cultural forms, perceiving ideological messages selectively/subversively, and so on” (1993, p. 13). The notion of the active viewer does however not necessarily require the viewer to be alert, attentive and original (Livingstone 1990). It is also applicable for a more mindless process where the text is fitted into familiar framework and habits (Livingstone 1990). These valuable insights regarding naturally occurring television viewing can provide important input to the investigation of naturally occurring advertising viewing. However, the unsolicited nature of the commercial break and the fact that viewers have a well-developed sense of advertising’s objective to persuade imply that the commercial breaks are often watched differently. Viewers are aware that there is a persuasive motive behind advertising, and they recognize that advertisers’ communications are presenting their products and services in a positive light and that the commercial messages may be biased and varied in their truthfulness (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994; Brucks, Armstrong, and Goldberg 1988).

It happens that the viewer, in solo-viewing situations, just continues to watch the screen when the content displayed on the screen changes from editorial content to commercial content. In watching the commercial break in such a way, the viewer is acting very much like a subject during an experiment. An illustration of this experiment-like style of watching is with the informant Kevin. Kevin is 4 years old. His mother Melissa lets him watch the children’s morning shows while she is getting

ready for going to work. When the break comes on Kevin keeps on watching just like before the when the program was on. Kevin does not even change his posture. Instead Kevin continues to focus his attention to what is happening on the screen:

It is early in the morning and Kevin is watching a children's program. Kevin is still undressed after his morning bath. He is lying comfortably on his stomach on the sofa. The program presenter announces that a short break is coming up. Kevin keeps on lying on the sofa with his eyes focused on the screen. Three ads come on. They are all advertising children's products: a toy ice cream maker, cheese snacks and lollipops. The program comes on again. Kevin is still on the sofa. He hasn't changed his posture throughout the commercial break.

(Observational notes from the Ford household)

The incidents where informants keep on watching throughout the commercial break, like Kevin did, are nevertheless rare in number (cf. Krugman et al. 1995). The interruption of the chosen viewing experience that the commercial break represents for the viewers can lead them into engaging into other behaviors rather than continuing to watch throughout the whole length of it. Instead viewers display different patterns of watching during the commercial breaks, where watching throughout the length of the commercial break is merely one of possible several possible viewing patterns. One pattern of watching that appears during the commercial break is when a viewer is watching one or several advertisements before she starts to engage in channel switching. The episode below, where the informant Pete is engaging in watching during a couple of advertisements, serves as an illustration of this kind of watching behavior. Pete has finished watching the news, and is going to evaluate his future viewing options. Pete watches three different advertisements with full attention on the screen. When the fourth advertisement starts, Pete reaches for the remote control and starts to flick:

It is 4.25 PM; Pete is sitting on the sofa and is watching Sky News. The remote control is lying next to him on the sofa. The

program ends. Pete is watching the screen while scratching his head. The commercial break begins with an ad for *Royal Liver* [*Featuring different people in different situations and circumstances; at a railway station, on a sailing boat etc. The ad is narrated by a woman and there is music in the background*]. Pete is watching the ad with both eyes on screen. The next ad comes on. It is an ad for *L'Oreal* [*It begins with a woman talking about her hair. Then it moves on to show the woman in a shower. After that, the woman is with her beautiful hair. A male voice is narrating.*]. Pete is watching with eyes on screen throughout the ad. The third ad starts. It is an ad from *Dial a Phone* [*A mobile phone is shown. The ad is narrated by a male speaker.*] Pete is still watching with eyes on screen. The next ad starts. It is an ad selling fire alarms [*It is in a documentary style, showing the joys of a fire alarm. The ad is narrated by a male speaker.*]. When this ad starts, Pete is reaching for the remote control. When Pete gets a hold of the remote control and he starts to flick...

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Viewers can keep the remote control within an arm's length distance in order to facilitate channel switching both during programming, as well as during commercial breaks. Novelty is a reason stated for the postponement of engaging in the intended channel flicking. Informants state that they are more likely to stay with an advertisement that they never have been exposed to before:

Robert: It is a good time to flick and see what is on the other channels!

Researcher: But you do watch some ads first.

Robert: I do watch some ads, yes. Sometimes I like it. Especially if I have not seen it before.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

There is a willingness to check out a new advertisement in order to see if the advertisement is funny or not. Another reason why a viewer might want to get an exposure to a new ad is that it provides her with conversation fuel for interactions

with friends and acquaintances. The informant Robert says that he often talks to his friends about advertising: 'Oh. Did you see the new Budweiser ad?' In keeping up with the latest advertisements the viewer does not risk getting blanked out in conversations at for school and work (Ritson and Elliot 1999). In the plethora of programs, due to the increased number of channels, a person is more likely to have watched the latest Nike ad than a certain program, and thus makes it an easy topic of conversation. Another reason for continuing watching the advertisement is if the viewer previously has found that particular advertisement interesting or entertaining. The informants like to be entertained by advertisements that they find funny. However, this humoristic effect gets worn out after a limited number of exposures. When a viewer actively is watching an advertisement out of curiosity she is applying a relatively focused viewing mode. However, given that the viewer's original intention was to flick to another channel, the curiosity awoken by one advertisement does not necessary mean that the viewer will continue watching the advertisements that follows. It is a viewing mode restricted for a couple of advertisements in anticipation for the channel switching activity to begin.

Another type of viewing pattern that happens during the course of the commercial breaks is the kind of watching that takes place in passing. This viewing pattern takes on the type of idling form (Lindlof et al. 1988). It is such viewing that takes place unintentionally when a viewer returns from having engaged in some sort of tasking behavior in another room, or when there is a natural pause arising in a conversation between fellow viewers. An illustration of this kind of viewing pattern is the below episode, where the informant Michael is devoting the intra-program break to put his daughter Katie to bed. However, Michael happens to walk back in to the room when the commercial break is still going on. Michael unintentionally catches the last half of an advertisement for McDonalds, before the break finishes and Michael's chosen viewing experience recommence:

It is 8.46 PM; Michael is watching an episode of Victoria's Secrets on Channel4. Michael is sitting on the sofa and has both eyes on the screen. His little daughter Katie is sitting on his lap. There is an intra program break coming up. During the first ad for *McDonalds* [Short ad just showing a burger and then the price],

Michael turns down the volume, and looks at his daughter while saying quietly:

“We are going to bed now.” Michael stands up with Katie in his arms, and starts walking out of the room. There have been no eyes on the screen through the ad. The next ad comes on, *Go Ahead* [At a police station, the female police officer can not resist eating up the evidence.] Michael with Katie in his arms exits the room. There are no eyes on the screen. The commercial break continues. The room is empty. Then an ad for *McDonald's* comes on again. Mid ad, Michael walks in and sits down on the sofa. Michael watches the screen. The program starts again. Michael continues to have eyes on screen, and takes the remote control and puts up the volume again...

(Observational notes from the Adams household)

A third kind of viewing pattern that arises is when the household context actually brings the viewer into watching an advertisement. Particularly in solo-viewing occasions the exo-spatial tasking of going to the kitchen in order to bring back some kind of food or beverage can result in some kind of watching when the viewer comes back into the living room and starts eating or drinking. Consuming food or drink at the same time as performing other tasks or behaviors is hard to master. Watching the television screen is the behavior that does compromise the ability of consuming food and drinks the least, since it is only requiring the viewer to keep a regular eye contact with what is happening on the screen in order to succeed in the sense making process:

It is 23.45; Robert is watching television with a cup of tea and some biscuits in front of him. Robert reaches for the remote control and starts flicking. Robert stops at a channel where a video recording of the British comedian Frank Skinner's comedy act is being advertised. Robert puts down the remote control in order to take a sip of his tea and a bite of his biscuit. The next ad comes on. It is for a *Nokia PDA*. Robert continues to snack on his biscuit and sip his tea. While he is doing this, he is having both eyes on the screen. The next ad for *Lea and Perrins* sauce comes on. Robert reaches for the remote control again...

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Figure 5.14: Monitoring the Screen



Intake of food and beverages can lead the viewer to monitor the screen during the commercial break (Example from the Edwards Family).

In the present study the informants are displaying this kind of monitoring (Lindlof et al. 1988) in combination with food and drink intake. In this kind of monitoring, the viewer looks at the screen temporarily while taking a bit of a food or a snack or taking a sip of a beverage.

A fourth kind of viewing pattern arises when the viewer make a conscious decision to stay with the commercial break for the full length of the commercial break. A reason for staying with the commercial break might be program related. The viewer does not want to risk missing vital parts of the program. Viewers can also assume that a certain program might have funnier or more interesting advertisements. This is under the assumption that advertisements are targeted at the specific group of viewers watching a certain program, (i.e., that the advertising will be congruent in content and style with the program). An illustration of this is provided by the Empty Nesters Richard and Margaret. In social viewing situations Richard and Margaret regularly mutes the sound when the break comes on in order to be able to more fully concentrate on other activities. However, even the Empty Nesters might refrain from muting during intra-program, and inter-program breaks. This exception is based on the hypothesis that certain programming attracts certain kind of advertisers. Richard and Margaret believe that a program with somewhat raunchy content might be followed by similar kinds of advertisements:

Researcher: What is the program you might stay with?

Richard: Eurotrash

Margaret: Yes.

Researcher: Why would you stay with the ads when Eurotrash is on?

Richard: Because they are probably sexier oriented.

Margaret: I mean are they?

Richard: I don't know, might be probably.

Researcher: Tell me about that though, why would you assume that the ads were sexier oriented?

Richard: Because the night that it is on, it's a sort of a, probably very soft porn viewing.

Researcher: So [from] the program, you have expectations...

Margaret: Wow, yes! Yes.

(Interview excerpt from the Childs household)

Another reason for making the conscious decision to stay with the channel when the commercial comes on and watch is that after a busy day the viewers want to chill down in front of the television. Under certain circumstances viewers watch advertisements as a means of diversion (McQuail 1994). Viewers then depend on the television as an instrument for winding down. Even in these cases the chosen viewing experiences are the programs. The commercial breaks are watched because they happen to be on a certain channel, inside a program, or in between two programs. The continuation of viewing agrees well with the intention of relaxation. Engaging in other behaviors during the commercial break would clash with the relaxation mode:

Researcher: Do you think that you watch much advertising?

Laura: I think so. Yes, I think probably do. It's more since maybe, in one way, in the evenings since I've had children because I am more dependent on television for relaxing in the evenings. Since I have had children it's like I stare at the telly and you know and it's like not obvious to move away from the advertising in between because I am tired or whatever. So I just watch... Tim will flick or something, or comment on ads, you know, but more and more I find that if I am tired, then I am just willing to watch advertising. Because before children it's like you would get up and go and make a phone call or switch over or switch off the telly.

(Interview excerpt from the Drummond household)

After a activity filled day at work and after a couple of busy hours at home which includes food preparation and other household related tasks, sitting down in front of

the television offers the viewer a way of escaping (Katz et al. 1974) the pressures and worries of the every day and life-world contexts. By being entertained by what is broadcasted on the screen, not matter if it is commercial or editorial content, it provides the viewers with a possibility to take their minds of their concerns, and in turn relax:

Ruthie: I am comatose probably. What I am doing is... I am coming in here when I have done all my work. I've been to work, I've come home, I've cooked and maybe I've done something for the following day. So in coming in here and I am totally wrecked up usually, so I am just lying more or less ready to go to bed and I usually drop off. So, I just want to be entertained, whether it is by a program or whether it is by the ads. I really don't care if it is the ads. If I've got enough energy to flick through to something else then I will do it, but otherwise I'm probably just as happy to sit here and watch them.

(Interview excerpt from the Barnes household)

In the study the informants are more prone to watch the advertisements as the evening progresses. As people get tired they run of fuel to engage in any behavior that would call for an increased level of effort on their part. The informant Michael brings up the subject of time, as do other informants, in the discussion about engaging in different behaviors during different commercial break. In the conversation that followed Michael was asked to expand a bit on the effect that time has on the behavior he engages in when the commercial break comes on:

Researcher: Give me two examples, the contrasts between two different times of the day and how that has an impact on how...

Michael: Well, I don't think I'd ever look at an ad during the day. I always tend to go and do something. I'd feel bad about sitting down and watching television, any *television*, during the day. In the evening, I suppose you're in a more relaxed state and you, I mean personally I have to admit I would watch anything when I am in a certain state of mind. If I feel very tired, and I've had a stressful day, I will [be] watching television almost like an

amnesiac or whatever the word is. We... Amnesia (Michael laughs.)

Researcher: You would never watch the ads during the day. Why would it be different from the evening? What is different during the day?

Michael: Well, because I said I feel I ought to be doing something. I mean, if I watch television during the day I always have an element of guiltiness. Whereas in the evening it's er...like something I do just to relax really.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

There is thus a temporal aspect to this kind of viewing activity. The natural rhythms of the environment and the body (Adam 1995) are affecting the behavior of the viewers. The reason for watching a certain commercial break rather than engaging in another kind of behavior is rather associated with feelings of fatigue rather than an appreciation for advertising per se. In this kind of viewing the viewer experiences a lack of physical and mental energy:

It around 10 PM. Melissa is sitting on the sofa watching Big Brother in the dark. An intra-program break comes on. Melissa is keeping her eyes on the screen. An ad for Metz Schnapps comes on [*The ad is in a fairytale style with a female narrator*]. Melissa is watching the screen throughout the ad. Then an ad for Orange starts [*A man is visiting an Asian temple, but with the help of Orange he gets information on what is happening in the world of football. The ad has a male speaker voice*]. Melissa still has her eyes on the screen. Then a trailer for the movie *Snatch* comes on, followed by ads by PC World [*There is going to be a sale, customers are queuing outside the store eagerly anticipating the big event*], Direct Line [*A man talking to a crowd from a crane. Suddenly he starts throwing money at them. Then comes the instrumental signature melody: "Pipippipipip"*], www.24.net [*Featuring a woman dressed in black and a butterfly. Numbers keeps on appearing on the screen. The ad is narrated by a male speaker.*]. Also throughout these ads Melissa keeps on watching the screen. Then the last ad within the break comes on. It is an ad by Vauxhall [*People in white lab coats in a laboratory setting are talking. Then the subject of the experiment appears: It is a bearded man dressed only in underpants. He stands outside an*

office building, then he steps into a car and the camera follows him while he is driving around talking about the car]. Melissa keeps on watching throughout this ad too. Big Brother starts again. Melissa continues to watch the program. Throughout the full length of the commercial break, Melissa has not changed her posture once and she has been keeping her eyes on the screen at all times.

(Observational notes from the Ford household)

The feeling of guiltiness felt during the earlier hours of viewing is slowly fading away while the hours are passing as the viewer feels more tired. This relaxation mode then brings along a more inactive viewer that gradually slides on the verge of inertia as the bedtime is rapidly approaching:

Researcher: But you are less likely to get up and do something late in the evening?

Melissa: That's when I am tired.

Researcher: Tell me a little bit about that.

Melissa: Because I suppose when I am tired all the things that I wanted to do that day, if I haven't done it by then, I haven't got any energy do it. So I suppose that is why... That's in a nutshell, that's it. I am too tired. I really should be in bed. So I don't, the last thing I want to be doing really is other things. It is that stage.

Researcher: So how does that play to the advertisements?

Melissa: Well, I probably say that I'd stare at them. So maybe I am taking it in.

(Interview excerpt from the Ford household)

However, this kind of viewing during the stages of increased tiredness is not necessarily associated with full attention being directed to the processing of a particular advertisement. The fatigue is not merely associated with a lower energy

level and resulting in less physical activity. It is also associated with a winding down mode, a sort of mental preparation before going to bed:

Researcher: Well, you are lying there watching the ads, so sometimes you do watch them, why do you think, in that particular example, you just sat there watching the ads?

Lisa: I was probably, if it was around half nine, I was probably knackered and more thinking 'I'll probably go to bed in a minute'. I'm just switched off. More just chilling and just watch them for the sake of watching it, rather than interest watching it.

Researcher: Well you just said 'when the ad break comes on I will switch off'. What do you mean by switch off? Do you mean physically?

Lisa: Yes, switch off my attention from the program and back onto my other things.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

The kind of viewing mode that Lisa and the others are illustrating is corresponding with a low involvement viewing mode. Their eyes are directed on the screen, but the question is how much attention they are paying? The viewing activity requires less energy than the other options available. If a person is looking at the television it doesn't necessary mean that she is seeing something (Krugman, 2000).

Up until now, watching a commercial break for parts of it or through the entire commercial break has been discussed in terms of the individual viewer. Advertising viewing during social viewing can take on the form of idling and monitoring as discussed above. When watching television together with other people the commercial break takes on an inherently social nature. During social interactions commonly there are natural pauses in the conversation (Potter and Wetherell 1999). At these moments it is likely that the viewers turn their attention briefly to the screen before taking up the conversation again (idling). Also during social interaction, it happens that a viewer monitors what is being broadcasted on the screen. This monitoring activity takes place when there are more than two people present, because then not all fellow viewers can

be involved simultaneously in the other-directed gaze (Krauss and Chiu 1998) which is an intrinsic part of every conversation. One viewer's intention to watch an advertisement clashes with the co-viewer's need for attention and social interaction. Viewing can be a non-selective activity if the viewer gets exposed to something chosen by someone else. This kind of viewing is referred to as "enforced viewing" (Morley 1988) and can increase the 'enforced' viewer's wish for social interaction, resulting in higher pressure for sociality. A strategy for the other viewer that has the objective to watch is then to acknowledge the presence of the other person, by some verbal and mainly physical interaction, and then return to the viewing activity:

The TV is showing a sports program. Nicole and her boyfriend Pete are watching the program during silence. The commercial break comes on. Nicole is trying to get Pete's attention. During the first ad they are exchanging some words. Pete takes Nicole's hand. By the end of the ad they turn their attention back to the screen again. They watch an ad from *Customs Confidential* during silence while still holding hands. Nicole and Pete keep on watching the screen. The sports program comes on again. They are still watching with eyes on the screen screen.

(Observational notes from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

When individuals' viewing objectives are compatible with each other, then even a viewing situation where the viewers are engaged in watching the whole commercial break during silence could be a viable outcome. Although in the present study there are no incidents of such behavior. Even if a commercial break is watched mainly during silence there is at one point, or another a verbal and physical exchange going on between the fellow viewers. However, as the evening progresses the more common is it to find incidents of longer periods of non-interrupted advertising viewing even during situations of social viewing. This is due to reduced energy levels of the viewers. When approaching bedtime, it gets harder and harder to engage in social interaction because it requires more mental effort on the part of the viewers.

In sum, the behaviors that occur during the commercial break can be divided into six different categories. The categories are Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction,

Tasking, Reading, Zapping, and Advertising Watching. In the next chapter I will qualify this taxonomy of behaviors occurring during the commercial break.

Chapter 6

Qualifying the Taxonomy

In Chapter 5 the potential audiences for television advertising were investigated and a categorization of six different cultural behaviors was established. Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction, Tasking, Reading, Zapping, and Advertising Watching describe the cultural phenomenon of consuming the commercial break. However, for a deeper understanding of the potential audiences for television advertising it must be acknowledged that the phenomenon is more complex than would be possible to illustrate by purely listing and depicting the archetypical behaviors occurring during the frame of the commercial break.

In this chapter, we will underline a set of contingencies that have implications for the types of behaviors that the potential audiences for television advertising will engage in during the commercial break in the context of the home. The label ‘contingency’ here refers to broader issues that, although of key importance for a thorough understanding of the consumption of the commercial break, could not be appropriately addressed within the thematic structure of the previous chapter. More specifically, these contingencies discuss ways in which different combinations of contextual elements lead to different behaviors. In detailing the cultural behaviors in Chapter 5, some of these issues shortly have been touched upon but always in the context of one specific behavior. In this chapter these contingencies are discussed within the broader frame of the commercial break. First, it is not possible to decipher

the social consumption of the commercial break from just studying the behavior of the individual 'receiver'. Second, one also has to acknowledge that the composition of the group can be of importance. Third, no commercial break situation is exactly the same, even though the social context and the program context are the same. Fourth, time is a factor that will affect the action range of the potential audiences of television advertising. In listing the contingencies, the cultural behaviors are still treated as static and compartmentalized. In the following section of this chapter we add complexity to the taxonomy by underlining how cultural behaviors blend into each other and the flow of behaviors occurring in the consumption of the commercial break. Moreover, it is acknowledged that there is no dichotomy between viewing and non-viewing. At the end of this chapter the cultural meaning of the commercial break is pondered upon in order to provide a fuller understanding of the cultural phenomenon in question.

2 is Different than 1+1

Encountering a commercial break during the course of an evening of solitary viewing is constitutively different from encountering the break during an evening of social viewing. Social psychology demonstrates that the social environment exerts powerful influences on individual thinking and behavior (Gilbert, Fiske, and Lindzey 1998). When watching alone, the viewing (or, in the words of reader-response theory, the "reading") of the commercial break or of a particular advertisement can be seen as a motivated act; people choose for a reason to watch or not to watch (Scott 1994). However, when watching together with others the consumer is part of a social context where others' objectives might coincide or clash with the consumer's. The presence of others might both bring the consumer's attention to and away from the commercial break. The natural thing to do when a commercial break comes on during hours of social viewing is to engage in some kind of social exchange. During social viewing the commercial break is defined as the time to be social. Since the commercial break is an interruption from the chosen viewing experience, the space within a program or between programs means time available for social exchanges of different kinds. The unsolicited nature of the commercial break means people in social situations are obliged to shift their attention to their fellow viewers and away from the screen. As a

consequence it would be inappropriate to prioritize watching the commercial messages before socializing. This means that when watching with others, to continue watching in silence can be used as a tool for avoiding contact. This will in turn be interpreted by a fellow viewer as a sign of unwillingness to communicate, for example a sign that you are upset. Not engaging in social exchange during the commercial break will thus be seen as a nonverbal statement in the ongoing social processes of the household. People need to have satisfactory motives in order to engage in alternative behaviors other than social exchanges when the commercial breaks come on during social viewing episodes. The amount of conversation going on during the program break is generally increasing with the number of people in the room (see Appendix 2 for exemplification of this effect). With a larger number of people watching in the room, comes a higher likelihood that somebody will initiate a conversation. In the words of the informant Kate, “If you are in a packed room you have got more chances to have a conversation” (interviews quote from the Mixed Multiple Adult household). Not only is there a social norm to engage in social exchanges during social viewing. People also have different topics or agendas that they wish to bring up during the course of an evening. The commercial break provides people with an opportunity to bring up what’s on their mind without disturbing the others. The commercial break is an arena where interaction and communication are not only allowed, but encouraged. Just introducing the social component of the commercial break will alter the types of behaviors that will be undertaken, and also have a profound effect on if and how advertising reception will take place.

A+B is Different than A+C

The composition of the group also affects the behaviors (Levine and Moreland 1998) Different social dyads create and uphold their own interactional rules. Depending on who is in the room the dynamics of interaction might change. The relative social status of the people interacting are governing the turn-taking in the interaction, and also affecting the character it takes on. This change of dynamics is apparent throughout the participating households. An example to illustrate this is the all-girls-household where the presence of one of the girls, Anna, can alter the behavior of the

other two, Bea and Celia. Anna is very opinionated and tends to be the key-person in deciding what to watch and what to talk about during the commercial breaks. Bea explains that Anna requires complete silence when watching something she finds engaging:

Researcher: Why, I mean is that common, to have those conversations during the ads?

Bea: Yes, there are a lot of things that Anna won't let me breathe during.

Researcher: Tell me about that, just take me through it...

Bea: Well, I have lived with Anna for a long time at university. When University Challenge was on and you opened a packet of crisp she would kill you!

(Interview excerpt from the Multiple Female household)

Anna's presence also changes the character of what will happen during the commercial break. During commercial breaks Anna might comment on an advertisement that she particularly likes or dislikes, whereas Bea and Celia (watching without Anna) tend to completely focus on their conversations. Since Anna is the one setting the tone for what kind of behavior to engage in, her presence might actually lead to more advertising watching as well as advertising interaction, even if there are more people present in the room. Anna monitors the television screen as to not miss an advertisement that she particularly likes or an advertisement she has never seen before. All of the girls like to talk when the commercial break comes on. During these conversations, Bea and Celia change their seating position as to be able to see each others' faces. The two girls sit on the sofa next to each other, which makes it possible to curl up more comfortably when they want to. Regardless, if Anna is watching alone or in company with the other girls, she always sits in the big armchair to the left of the sofa. When the girls are engaged in social interaction Anna turns her head to the other girls when she is talking to them, but can throw glances on the screen when they are talking or responding to her comments. The fact that Anna is monitoring the screen leads the other girls from time to time to turn their heads towards the screen. If Anna

finds something that she likes or dislikes she might bring the other girls into the advertisement.

Anna is sitting in the armchair, and Bea and Celia are sitting next to each other on the sofa. The girls are involved in a discussion. An ad for a vodka brand comes on [A shot of a herd of Reindeers in a landscape covered in snow. A group of people, consisting of young stunning blondes and old blokes wearing Lapp attires, are sitting around a fire drinking vodka Source. It is very cold. The girls are cold and demand with a Swedish Accent the old blokes to throw their clothes on the fireplace...] When the advertisement comes on the girls are still involved in the discussion. However Anna monitors the screen and says: "Mmm, I love this ad!" Her remark makes Celia and Bea to turn their heads and attention to the screen. All the girls are watching the advertisement in silence. After the advertisement reaches its climax the girls giggle enthusiastically to what they have just been watching.

(Observational notes from the Multiple Female household)

The episode above is an illustration of how an alteration of the group composition can lead to a different behavioral outcome.

Different Situations, Different Behaviors

Viewers do exhibit different patterns of behavior (see Appendix 2 for exemplification of behavioral footprints). One viewer might prefer to engage in channel flicking when the commercial break comes on, but depending on who is present in the room at the time of the viewing this preferred behavior might not be engaged in. Another viewer might be an avid consumer of television advertising. Some households tend to engage in more elaborate social interactions. In other households it might be enough to just engage in more sparse type of phatic communication (Fiske 1990) in order to keep the lines of communication open. However no single viewer or constellation of viewers will behave in exactly the same way during all commercial breaks. Not even will the behavior be the same during a commercial break that occurs in or between programs

Figure 6.1: Different Situations, Different Behaviors



Even if people are more prone to engage in a certain behavior during the commercial break, there will be variations in what they do when the break comes on. Not even if the program context and the composition of viewers are the same will the behavioral outcome necessarily be the same. Margaret tends to be the one with the possession of the remote control and ordinarily she mutes the sound when the commercial break comes on. On a rare occasion, Richard is holding the remote control and he does not mute the sound which leads to him pulling a joke on Margaret (Childs household).

that are watched on a recurring basis. Two episodes from the household of Margaret and Richard illustrate that no viewing situation is exactly the same because the commercial break takes place in a complex environment. When empty nesters Margaret and Richard watch television together it is Margaret that holds possession of the remote control and decides on the viewing schedule. On the way home from work, Margaret sits on the bus and decides when consulting the TV-guide what is going to be her and Richard's viewing schedule for the upcoming evening. During the couple's evening viewing they have a habit of muting the sound when the commercial break comes on. Both empty nesters complain that they feel disturbed by the sound level during the commercial break. The muting of the sound then serves as a facilitator to engage in other kinds of behavior than the mere watching of the commercial break. In the example below, Margaret par usual mutes the sound and Richard takes up a crossword in order to engage in some inter media behavior.

Margaret (seated in the armchair), and Richard (seated on the right hand side of the sofa) are watching their favorite daily soap opera Coronation Street. When the break comes on Margaret mutes the sound as she usually does. Richard picks up the newspaper and attempts to solve the crossword. Richard looks up at Margaret and indicates he is in dire need for some help:

"Holland Gin?" Margaret replies a bit absentmindedly:

"Holland Gin... G... L... N..." Richard is at this point totally focused on his crossword. Margaret, meanwhile, is throwing some glances on the screen. Richard then makes a new attempt to get some help from his wife:

"Satirical sketch?" Margaret asks how many letters:

"How many?" Richard responds:

"4." Suddenly Richard lifts his head from the crossword and starts looking at the muted screen where an ad for Kentucky Fried Chicken is showing some steamy, chicken legs. Richard reacts positively to what he sees:

"That looks nice!" Margaret doesn't respond to what Richard just said. Instead she looks at Richard, seemingly wanting to continue the discussion about the crossword:

"4 or 5?" Richard shows four fingers in the air. Margaret verbalizes the number of letters:

"4..." Richard who is not getting any answer on his previous enquiry decides to move on to the next word that he is experiencing difficulties with:

"M...P...P...L...A... seven letters?"

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

Although the typical behavior of Margaret and Richard when engaging in social viewing is to mute the sound as soon as they realize that the commercial break comes on in order to engage in social interaction or inter media readings, as exhibited above, they can also engage in other behaviors. In the example below, Margaret has decided to engage in some tasking during the commercial break and has therefore left the remote control in the hands of Richard. However, Margaret is still in charge of the viewing schedule, and has told Richard that they are now going to watch what she calls “Channel 3” where Coronation Street is about to start. When Richard gets to be in charge of the remote control, he does not immediately mute the sound as Margaret does. Instead he starts out watching the screen while playing around with the remote control:

Richard is watching the television screen while sitting on the sofa and playing with the remote control. Margaret (previously seated in the armchair) stands up and walks up to the TV in order to get something. At the same time an ad for Pringles potato crisps comes on. [In the ad a pizza delivery guy rings at on doorbell of a big house where a party is being held]. Margaret has not been watching the screen, but she reacts to the sound, and turns around to face Richard in order to find out what the noise was about: “Was that the doorbell?” Richard mischievously shrugs his shoulders while answering: “I don’t know.” Margaret, with an annoyed tone of voice: “I’ll go!” Margaret walks out of the room. Richard laughs for himself pleased that Margaret has misunderstood the situation. Then Richard mutes the sound of the television. Margaret opens the front door. Seconds later Margaret’s utters from the hallway: “I think it was from the telly... It was on the telly.” She then closes the front door. Richard puts on the sound of the television again, and continues to grin and then says silently: “I know.” At this moment Margaret walks back in to the living room and looks at her husband and says with an upset voice: “What? Did you say anything? A real coward you are!” Margaret then goes on to pick up something from the floor. The bickering continues, and Richard does not want to admit that he was aware of that the noise was coming from the ad: “I didn’t know!” Margaret goes on: “Yes, you did, you went...” Margaret sits down again in her armchair while looking at Richard. Richard continues quietly: “I did not.”

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

The above examples of Empty Nesters, Margaret and Richard are both taken from commercial breaks in immediacy to Coronation Street. Even in this example where the program context is the approximately the same (the same program, but different advertising pod) and the composition of viewers is the same, nevertheless the situation is different, and the behaviors that the informants are engaging in are different.

The Impact of Time on Behaviors

The households generally tend to engage more in watching advertisement the later the hour of the viewing (see Appendix 2 for exemplification of this effect). As people get tired it becomes harder to engage in any behavior that calls for an increased level of effort on their part. The informant Michael brought up the subject of time, as did other informants. In the conversation that followed Michael was asked to expand a bit on the effect that time has on the behavior he engages in when the commercial break comes on:

Researcher: Give me two examples, the contrasts between two different times of the day and how that has an impact on how...

Michael: Well, I don't think I'd ever look at an ad during the day. I always tend to go and do something. I'd feel bad about sitting down and watching television, any television, during the day. In the evening, I suppose you're in a more relaxed state and you, I mean personally I have to admit I would watch anything when I am in a certain state of mind. If I feel very tired, and I've had a stressful day, I will [be] watching television almost like an amnesiac or whatever the word is. We... Amnesia [Michael laughs]

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

When a commercial break comes on there are many possible behaviors that one can engage in. Some of these behaviors are necessary for the everyday organization of the household, and others are dedicated to the maintenance of the complex social

relationships that exist within the context of a household (Zwaga 1992). By immersing into the programming the viewer creates a space for themselves (Radway 1984). The arrival of a commercial break thus serves as a crude reminder of the everyday life of the viewer. However, later in the evening the household chores have been attended to. Exhausted after a hard day's work the informants finally feel that they can relax for a bit:

Researcher: Do you think that you watch a lot of advertising:

Laura: I think we do. Yes. I think I do. It's more since maybe, in one way in the evening, since I've had children, because I am more dependent on television for like relaxing in the evenings. Since I have children, it's like [I] stare at the telly, and you know it's like not obvious to move away because maybe I am tired or whatever. So I just watch. John [Laura's husband] will flick or something or comment on the ads, but more and more I find if I am tired then I am just willing to watch the advertising...

(Interview excerpt from the Drummond household)

The informants label the late night viewing as a way of relaxing. The relaxation is a way of winding down. As evident from the interview data, the feeling of guilt felt during the earlier hours of viewing is slowly fading away while the hours are passing and the informants are feeling more tired. The relaxation mode then brings along a more inactive viewer. This viewer rapidly approaching bed time slides on the verge of inertia. Time is an important determinant of the action range of the potential audiences for television advertising.

Flow of Behaviors

In previous sections, the cultural behaviors are still treated as static and compartmentalized. Therefore we need additional qualification to stress how they blend together. The behavior that a viewer is displaying is by no means static. Rather, a continuous flow of different behaviors is displayed. Contextual factors have the

Figure 6.2: Time Matters




Behaviors differ between different hours. Viewers are more active in their pursuit of other activities in the earlier hours of viewing. Later in the evening, even a person that usually engages in for example channel surfing when a break commercial break comes on is more likely to engage in some advertising watching. Robert is watching the screen when bedtime is approaching instead of engaging in channel switching, as he tends to do when he is watching TV on his own (Edwards household).

propensity to feed into this flow of behaviors. In social viewing occasions, the behaviors of the different individuals present are intertwined, and therefore the flow of behaviors of one person is feeding into the flow of behaviors of another one and vice versa. As discussed in the previous chapter, the informants engage in different types of behaviors when the commercial breaks come on. However, the types of behavior that one informant is engaging in vary to differing extents. Needless to say no single informant behaves in exactly the same way during all commercial breaks, even though some informants are showing more or less stability in the types of behavior that they are exerting. In fact, ordinarily the informant is moving through a set of behaviors during the course of a commercial break. There can also be changes in behaviors within the course of one single advertisement. A viewer can also change between two parallel behaviors. The changes in the behaviors are spurred on by contextual factors. The viewer is found in a context rich environment where the powerful dynamics of the household, life world, every day life and broadcasting are competing for the viewer's attention. The episode below makes an illustration of the flow of behaviors during the course of a solo-viewing experience:

It is fifteen minutes before midnight; Robert is sitting in the armchair watching a film. He is enjoying a cup of tea and cookies that he has placed on the table by the armchair. When the commercial break come on Robert reaches for the remote control. Robert immediately flicks to another channel. Even on this channel the commercial break is on. An ad for different merchandises of the stand up comedian Frank Skinner comes on. Robert puts down the remote control and starts watching the screen while eating a cookie and sipping some tea. Next there is an ad for a Nokia PDA. Robert continues to eat a cookie and drink some tea. An ad for the sauce Lea and Perrins comes on. Now Robert picks up the remote control. He keeps on watching the screen. However when the next ad starts, Robert flicks in a matter of seconds. On this channel there is a broadcast of a professional wrestling tournament. Robert holds on to the remote control as to check out the program. Then he puts down the remote control and starts snacking again.

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Table 6.1: Flow of Behavior in the Case of One viewer

Time	TV Screen	Flow of behaviors
	Break starts	Takes remote control and flicks to another channel
	Break on other channel:	
	Ad1	Puts down remote control and starts watching
	Ad2	Drinks tea and eats cookie
	Ad3	Picks up remote control
	Ad4	Flicks immediately to another channel
	Wrestling tournament	Holds onto the remote control
		Puts down remote control
		Continues to watch

In the above example, the informant first moves from zapping to advertising viewing. Second, the informant moves from advertising watching to zapping again, until he settles for program watching. The table above illustrates this flow of behaviors.

During this kind of watching, which has been referred to as monitoring (Lindlof et al. 1988), the viewer throws occasional glances on the television screen while being engaged in another dominant behavior. In the episode below, Richard is engaged in an inter-medium activity, he is reading the daily newspaper. However while turning the pages; Richard briefly looks up on the television screen as if to monitor what is going on:

The commercial break starts. An ad comes on [It is in black and white showing people in stressful and fast-paced environments]. Richard scratches his head and starts to read his paper. An ad for Pearl White comes on [Showing a face, then a close up of the eye lashes and then a close up on the mouth and teeth], followed by an ad from British Gas [Shot in a “documentary style”: showing the interactions between a customer and a British Gas repairman].


Throughout these two ads Richard is focusing on his reading; he has no eyes on screen. An ad for Sky comes on [It is set in a delivery room. The new father is talking about the bliss of having Sky as a provider, rather than about the joy of fatherhood]. This ad happens to coincide with Richard turning the page. While turning the page Richard briefly looks up on the screen. He then goes back to reading with the paper covering his face. Later during the same ad, Richard turns the page again. Also this time he briefly looks up on the screen. He then returns to reading with the paper covering his face...

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

In the above example, the informant moves between two parallel behaviors. The dominant behavior is reading the newspaper. The secondary activity is advertising viewing in the form of monitoring. The table below illustrates how at the same time two parallel behaviors can be undertaken.

The focus of attention can shift rapidly from one type of behavior to another, thus bringing along a reversal in roles or a halt in the process of parallel activities. This means that the behavior that initially was the secondary behavior can, by a sudden shift in attention, become the dominant behavior and vice versa. Such role reversal is not be possible for all types of behaviors. One type of behavior that is well suited as a secondary activity might not be possible to perform together with another activity as a dominant behavior. Watching in the form of monitoring is compatible with most of the other types of behaviors. However, few parallel behaviors are possible to engage in if the dominant behavior is advertising viewing. A shift in attention that would challenge the balance between the dominant activity and the secondary activity would, in the case of watching, instead of a reversal of roles of the two parallel activities rather develop into a situation where a halt to the process of parallel activities would take place. Thus, monitoring as a secondary activity would instead be transformed into the only behavior undertaken, namely advertising viewing. The former dominant activity, (e.g., reading) would at this point in time stop, and possibly be resumed once the viewer would decide to stop the activity of advertising viewing. If resumed the reading would be a part of a flow of behaviors, rather than a process of two parallel activities.

Table 6.2: Parallel Behaviors

Time	TV screen	Dominant behavior: Reading newspaper	Secondary behavior: Glancing at the TV screen
	Break starts	Richard picks up the newspaper.	
	Ad 1	Richard starts reading... X X X	
	Ad2	X X X	
	Ad3	X X X	
	Ad4	X X	X
		X X	X
		X	

To recapture, in solo viewing settings there will be an ongoing flow of behaviors displayed by the viewer throughout the course of an evening in front of the television, the course of a commercial break or even the course of a specific advertisement. The viewer can be engaged in parallel behaviors where one secondary behavior is taking place at the same time as the dominant behavior is undertaken. The flow of behaviors will be affected by the household, life world and everyday contexts, but also by the broadcasting context. A change in the contexts that the viewer is immersed in, or a remembrance or a hasty thought of a specific contextual element, might lead to a change in the flow of behaviors or to a stop in the process of two parallel behaviors. The flow of behavior of a viewer during the course of an evening in front of the television, the course of a commercial break or the course of a specific advertisement

is complex to its' nature. The complexity increases further in the presence of two or more viewers, and with the interaction between viewers. In addition to the contextual elements before mentioned, there is in these cases also the social context to add to the complexity of the behavioral sequences.

In social viewing situations we have to take into account the flow of behaviors of several individuals and the complex interactions between these individual flows of behaviors. When more than one viewer is present in the room, not only will there be a flow of behaviors exhibited, but also will the notion of sociality affect the behaviors displayed (i.e., watching together with others is framing the action space of the viewers). Moreover, one viewer's behavior will exert influence on the other viewer's schema of actions and vice versa:

The commercial break comes on. Lisa and Robert start discussing the heating situation in the house. An ad for the bank, Abbey National, comes on featuring the concept of e-banking. Robert glances at the screen and blurs out to Lisa:
"Look that is that Abbey National thing!" On this remark Lisa turns to the screen. This means that both Robert and Lisa are watching the screen. Then Lisa turns to Robert after some moments of silence and says teasingly:
"I can't see you trying doing all that!" This comment makes Robert turn to his wife:
"Why? I am good at the Internet." Then he continues in a childlike way:
"Better than you..." Now an ad for IBM is rolling on the screen. Lisa and Robert are looking at each other. There is no glancing on the television screen. Robert carries on trying to assure Lisa about his knowledge of how to master the Internet:
"People even ask me to do things..." Lisa with surprise in her voice:
"Do they?" Robert moves on to clarify:
"The girls at the office do: 'Help me with this!' 'Help me with that!'" Then Robert tries to explain his excellence figuratively. He shows with his fingers how it is to type on an imaginative keyboard, and at the same time he is making bleeping sounds. Lisa responds to this mockingly:
"Little genius..." A natural pause arises in the conversation. At this moment both Robert and Lisa start watching the screen again.

Figure 6.3: Flow of Behaviors




People exhibit a flow of behaviors over the period of a commercial break, and even during the course of a single advertisement. This complexity of the flow of behaviors increases when there are more people present, since one person's behavior feeds into the other one's and vice versa. Lisa and Robert moves from advertising interaction to social interaction (Edwards household).

After a couple of seconds Robert stands up, picks up a plate and walks out of the room. Lisa looks at Robert as he walks out and says whiningly:

“I have my cheese and crackers!”

(Observational notes from the Edwards household)

Table 6.3: Complexity of the Flow of Behavior- the Case of two Viewers

Time	TV screen	Flow (Robert)	Flow (Lisa)
	Break starts		
	A1	Talk about heating	Talk about heating
		Looks at screen. Comments on ad.	Turns to screen. Turns to Robert and comments.
	Ad2	Turns to Lisa. Continues the comment.	Replies.
	Ad3	Continues to talk.	Short reply. End in conversation. Turns to screen
		Turns to screen. Stands up leaves and leaves the room	Asks Robert to bring things from kitchen

The above episode highlights the effect that the sociality of viewing has on the types of behaviors. The informants lead each other in and out of behaviors during the commercial breaks by the means of social interaction. The table above serves as a further illustration on how the flow of behavior of one viewer is affecting the flow of behaviors of another viewer.

When viewing takes place within a social context, the interaction between informants can paradoxically both lead the attention to what is happening on the screen and away from the moving images. In the case of the informants above this social process means that parts of one advertisement gets captures their attention. This in turn leads to a conversation on a related topic with the consequence that the following advertisement is completely ignored by the two informants. The commercial break exists in a context rich environment, where there are plentiful of potential attention grabbers all competing for the limited time that a viewer has on her hands. Immersed in this context rich environment, the viewer has several possible behaviors that she can engage in. Typically, therefore, there will be a flow in the behaviors displayed. Moreover, in social viewing circumstances viewers will affect each others span and order of behaviors that are pursued. The existence of complex patterns of behaviors during the consumption of the commercial break documented in this section highlights another important characteristic of the consumption of the commercial break that has not yet been discussed. Advertising meaning is a complex phenomenon that cannot be represented in black or white, using the simplifying theoretical distinction between viewing (or processing) and not viewing.

Viewing or Non Viewing – Not Necessarily a Dichotomy

In this study it became apparent that the consumption of television advertising cannot be regarded as a dichotomous phenomenon. One cannot easily divide the behavioral episodes into piles of “viewing” and “non-viewing” (or “processing” and “non-processing” of the advertisements). Rather than a black and white picture, there seem to be a continuous scale of attention directed to what is happening on the screen. Note the example from the previous section on parallel behaviors where the informant was engaged in newspaper reading as a dominant activity, but monitoring the television screen as a secondary activity, and thus showing signs of some level of attention to the advertisement.

Although there are relatively few incidents of pure exposure to advertisements, (i.e., examples where the informants (especially in social viewing circumstances) have both

Figure 6.4: Not a Dichotomy



There is no dichotomy between 'non-viewing' and 'viewing', but rather a matter of a continuum of attention paid towards what is being broadcast. Of course there are extreme cases, but often the level of attention is placed somewhere along the continuum. Richard is tapping his foot appreciatively to the music of the advertisement while reading the newspaper (Childs household).

eyes on the screen throughout the full length of an advertisement), this should not lead us to the conclusion that it is possible to make a distinction between the types of behaviors that will routinely bring on full attention or no attention to advertisements. Instead, it might be more relevant to talk about attention towards advertisement in the terms of a “continuum”.

In the episode below, Richard is seemingly directing all his attention to his inter-medium activity, which in this case happens to be engaging in newspaper reading activity:

Richard is sitting on the sofa in front of the TV waiting for his wife Margaret to come home from work. He has poured himself a glass of red wine that he keeps on the table next to the sofa. When the commercial break comes on Richard immediately picks up the daily newspaper that is placed next to him on the sofa, and starts reading it. When an ad from the retailer Argos comes on containing the old Status Quo song: “Whatever You Want,” Richard starts tapping his foot to the rhythm of the music, apparently enjoying what he is hearing. Throughout the whole advertisement Richard’s eyes are completely focused on the paper.

(Observational notes from the Childs household)

When the song “What ever you want” comes on it is apparent that Richard is aware of the sound coming from the television set. When probed about what he thought about this partial attention to the advertisement the discussion went as follows:

Researcher: I mean were you watching that ad or not as far as you are concerned?

Richard: No, I don’t think I was.

Researcher: But your foot is tapping...

Richard: Yes, that’s the music.

Researcher: So at some levels...

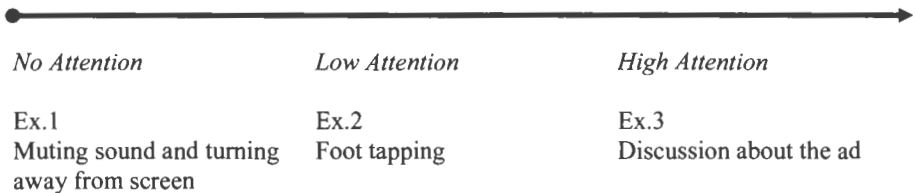
Richard: Yes, but I am still reading I think.

(Interview excerpt from the Childs household)

This awareness of the sounds coming out from the television set even though there are no eyes directed to screen is an example of advertising consumption occurrence with a low level of attention directed at the advertisement. Although the advertising response is far removed from the advertiser's preferred reading (Ceccarelli 1998), the sole processing (or reading) focus is in this case the song, still this is for Richard a pleasant advertising experience. On the continuum of attention, the case with the foot tapping would probably qualify as a case of low attention. The continuum of attention can be illustrated as in the table below:

Figure 6.5: Continuum of Attention

Level of attention



The continuum moves from no attention to high attention. This means that at the end points of the continuum, situations that would fit with the black and white dichotomy of non-viewing versus viewing (processing versus non-processing). An observation from the Childs Household where the informant Margaret mutes the sound and then turns away from the screen in order to undertake some tasking can serve as an example of non-attention to the advertisements. On the other side of the spectrum, an observation from the Female Multiple Household where the informant Anna leads her friends into an episode of advertising interaction can serve as an illustration of high attention to the advertisements. Generally, however, the attention directed to an

advertisement will be found somewhere on this continuum rather than at the end points.

Of particular importance to the discussion of low or partial attention advertising consumption is the role of sound. Partial attention to the advertisement, in the form of the registration of sounds, can lead the informant into advertising interaction without even involving any explicit advertising watching. In the episode below, this kind of advertising interaction takes the form of the informant starting to sing along with the music featured in a particular advertisement without even taking her eyes off the photos sorting out:

It is late in the evening, and Lisa sits on the sofa while going through some photos during the commercial break. An ad comes up featuring the song: "I have the time of my life". The music is rather low key at first, but towards the end of the advertisement more instruments join in. At the chorus: "I have the time on my life". Lisa starts to sing along feebly: "I have the time of my life..." When Lisa sings along she keeps on looking at her photos. After a brief sing-along exhibit, Lisa returns to being silent and keeps on looking at the photos. Throughout the observation Lisa does not look at the screen.

(Observational note from the Edwards household)

During the interviews it emerged that the informants feel confident in deciphering if the broadcast content is of commercial or editorial nature even from a limited set of cues. The informants think of themselves as proficient in estimating the lengths of the commercial breaks on different channels, and the beginning of a commercial break signals the starting point of such a countdown. Out of apprehension of missing out on a chosen viewing experience it is however common to engage in different kinds of monitoring activities; to momentarily listen in a more focused fashion to the sounds coming from the television or even to glance briefly as to check out what is currently being broadcasted:

Researcher: You are rarely paying full attention to the ads then?

Ruthie: No, but I probably would know what is going on.

Researcher: How is that possible when you are not really, we have not got that much footage where you are actually specifically watching the ads?

Steven: I probably listen. I don't know, maybe I can just, I am listening to it. I can probably do a couple of things... most people probably can. But I can, I don't know, maybe [Steven laughs] it is just the way the noise or the way ads come over, you know it is an ad even without thinking about it. The sound or the way people will speak in an advert, maybe because a lot of it sounds false? It never sounds like a real person actually trying to discuss something or with someone else in reality.

(Interview excerpt from the Barnes household)

The informants might even be in an adjacent room and still be able to grasp that there is an advertisement broadcasted in the living room. Due to a perceived (or actual) increase in volume and to differences in the types and stylistic formats of images and sounds used, the informants feel confident about discriminating advertisements from programs.

Robert: So you can have them going in one ear and still know what it is all about. And still be doing other things at the same time. I mean like the TV will be on. We could be in another room and you know that the ads are on. Just be listening to them."

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

Although the level of attention directed to the advertisement cannot be simply described by either full attention or no conscious attention, there are of course cases where the ends of the continuum do come into realization. Just as a person can be fully immersed in a reading of an advertisement, another person can be fully caught up in a discussion about an ongoing program. The first case resulting in full attention being paid on what is happening on the television screen, the second resulting in no conscious attention being paid at the content displayed on the television screen. Just

as a person can be in an adjacent room and still understand that the commercial break is on or even recognize specific advertisements, another person that has left the room where the television is on can completely forego on the sounds coming from the television set:

Researcher: How do you get that perfect timing though?

Sue: Well in here you can hear it because the kitchen is close enough, but there have been lots of times when you...you come back in and it's off or vice versa, so it is just practice.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

However, previous knowledge of a particular advertisement or of the style used by a particular advertiser, (e.g., an advertiser that uses the same music during a couple of years), can lead a viewer into attributing a certain advertising element, (e.g., sound), to a specific advertiser without even watching the screen. This attribution might even serve as a prompt to start engaging into some advertising watching or advertising interaction, if the viewer previously has found this particular advertisement entertaining to watch.

Researcher: What is interesting is you are talking but you are still aware of what the ads are saying.

Robert: Yes, yes. We know. I mean a lot of the ads use the same music, you know like British Airways use the same piece of music for all their ads and, you know, I think when there is something different when an ad comes on it is a new ad...

Lisa: If it is funny as well.

Robert: Like the Budweiser ad, the "Waz up" ads, you know, those crack us up quite a lot. Don't they?

Lisa: The lizard ones before that...

Robert: They are sort of different.

Researcher: And you are able to pick those? For example you'd be talking away and you'd notice when those came on?

Robert: Yes, yes, that's it. You'd probably be more sort of like you know you'd go 'Oh, it's that ad' and just for that 30 seconds, you'd just shut up for 30 seconds worth of advertising. And that's it.

(Interview excerpt from the Edwards household)

Several informants talk about the notion of tuning in and out of a state of listening to the sounds coming from the television set. Through a partial attention directed to the sounds coming from the television the informants describe how they tune into the sound upon being cued in by some element in the advertisement out of interest, or just because of an unexpected or particularly loud sound. As easily as the informants tune into the sound as easily they explain that they can tune out the sound. Laura talks about this tuning process, as having a volume that you can control yourself.

Researcher: But when you read a book do you think that you are aware of the commercials?

Laura: If I heard anything in it that fascinated me, then I would switch back to being able to hear yes.

Researcher: Like flicking in your mind?

Laura: It is like having two volumes permanently or three, if it is on, and you can control the volume yourself. And that volume is actually the brain taking in information...for example I tell you where I read, like the other day I did this. A commercial came on and I was suddenly aware that it was something about children and products, and I probably wanted to know if it was new. So I was reading and it was like 'Ok, I know about that now' It was like some food thing. Some new thing was out, whatever it was like, but I didn't stop reading. But then I knew I go back to turn off that, because I wanted to know about it. But then the rest I don't.

(Interview excerpt from the Drummond household)

Just as an episode of full attention directed to an advertisement at any time can change into an episode of non attention due to for example the instigation of some sort of

social interaction on the part of a fellow viewer, even the most nominal attention paid to the ongoings on the television screen can at any point in time transform into an episode of full attention to the advertisement if the viewer is responding to an audiovisual cue. The latter is possible through an inclination or preparedness on the part of the viewer to tune in and out of the audiovisual experience.

The behaviors during the commercial break cannot be satisfactorily described relying only on the reduced dichotomy of viewing or non-viewing of the advertisements. Instead most behaviors that take place during the course of a commercial break will be associated with a continuum of attention being paid to the advertisements. Of particular interest to the discussion of partial attention to advertising is the role of sound in advertising consumption. In the previous sections we qualified the taxonomy by looking at a set of contingencies. In the following pages we will address broader cultural issues related to these behaviors and the commercial break.

The Meaning of the Commercial Break

People in the Western world are exposed to thousands of advertising messages on an everyday basis. They encounter advertising in the morning while reading the paper, while being on the underground on the way to work etc. Even when they are entering the privacy of their own homes, sit down on their sofas and turn on their television sets, chances are high that they will encounter several commercial breaks during the hours of viewing. Undeniably advertising plays a significant role in the creation and recreation of cultural meanings (McCracken 1987; Leiss et al. 1997). Moreover, the omnipresence of advertising makes its conventions relatively easy to grasp, which in turn makes advertising an easily accessible tool in social exchanges (O'Donohoe 1995). With an increasingly dispersed media landscape, advertising is more likely to be a shared experience than for example a certain television program. Advertising is a medium that no one in our society can escape from encountering and experiencing. People come across unsolicited advertising in many different contexts. However, in the case of television advertising, it mostly reaches us in the context of our homes. The notion of privacy is closely linked to the concept of what constitutes a home

(Saunders 1981). The home is supposed to be a haven protected from the outside world. For this reason, any form of uninvited intrusion or disturbance, (e.g., a door-to-door salesman, noise from the street or a commercial break), is bound to be met by irritation to some degree. There is an evident clash between the unsolicited nature of the commercial break and the privacy notion of the home.

The commercial break is a built-in form of interruption within or between different programs on commercial channel. The commercial break does not occupy its own mediated space. People turn on the television in order to watch the programs and not the advertising. The commercial break can thus be classified as a 'para-medium' that exists within the mediated contexts of television as an unsolicited, yet ever-present, element of the viewing experience. For the informants the unsolicited nature of the break is a source of irritation. This is especially true for commercial breaks that are situated within a program, since those interrupt a certain viewing experience. The comment by Celia is representative of the general opinion of the informants:

Celia: In adverts, the choice is taken away. It's your living room, it is your evening and you are watching what you want, you chose. And the adverts are completely random, aren't they? Bombarding at you! And you... you think it is kind of an invasion, and if it annoys you, and it is in your home, that is even worse!

(Interview excerpt from the Female Multiple Adult household)

In the interview excerpt above, this informant stresses the uninvited feature of the commercial break. She is using war metaphors, like "invasion" and "bombarding", when trying to describe her feeling towards television advertising. The unsolicited aspect of the commercial break brings to it negative connotation. From an audience-centered perspective the commercial break does not automatically translate into advertising viewing. Instead the commercial break constitutes a period within a chosen activity, namely the program viewing, that the viewer can dispose the way she pleases. To engage in advertising viewing is one possible endeavor amongst other. Since the birth of commercial television viewers television advertising has been an inherent part of what viewers encounter during an evening in front of the television.

Throughout this period viewers have been socialized into finding different forms of coping with this innate feature of commercial television or to recapitulate the words of the informant Katherine: “been trained... [As]Pavlov’s dogs...” In doing so, the commercial break, despite the negative connotation, has taken on a significant part in the management of an evening in front of the television. As discussed in the section on Tasking in the previous chapter, the commercial break has taken on an enabling function. Paradoxically, the commercial break is both liked and disliked at the same time. It is disliked because it brings with it the unsolicited advertising, and liked because it rewards the viewer with some time to devote to matters that the viewing activity has put on hold.

The informants are underlining that they chose to watch the advertising break if they want to, and that it is not an automatic default activity. Instead the commercial break is seen as free time to spend on any activity that one think feasible. Jake is representative of the informants, when he expresses how he holds negative feelings to the interruptive character of the break. At the same time Jake admits to thinking that the commercial break can be a welcome feature within the course of a night in front of the television, because it provides the viewer with an opportunity to deal with other tasks without missing something of the programming:

Researcher: Do you have any opinion about it [advertising]?

Jake: It is pain in the arse.

Researcher: In what way?

Jake: Sometimes BBC is good where there are no ads. Other times it is good if you are watching a movie and you want to go and do something or make a cup of coffee or a toilet break.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

The compartmentalization between programs and commercial breaks has implications on the kinds of behaviors that the viewers choose to engage in. The active audience has been socialized into encounter advertising with skepticism (Mangleburg and

Bristol 1998). Their acquired persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994) will be present when they choose to read, interpret and evaluate an advertisement. In the case of television advertising reception, the audience is highly active and this sense of activeness leads to the rejection or embracement of particular advertising messages. However, there is more to it than the difference in reception between editorial and commercial content. The potential advertising reception is, by and large, affected by the meaning that people attach to the commercial break. By defining the commercial break as a “necessary evil” that provides free time, some advertisements are aired without anybody paying attention to them or even without anybody present in the room. This freedom is, however, not unlimited by nature but bounded by the contexts that the viewer is immersed in. During social viewing, this free time can actually bring up conflicting schemas to the surface.

As mentioned previously there are culturally bound norms and rituals for appropriate conduct during the commercial break on social viewing occasions. These norms and rituals can lead to the verbalization of tensions within a group at times of disparate viewing desires. The commercial break is a space where conflicting viewing agendas can come up to the surface and cause unsettlement among a group of viewers. Under the condition of conflicting viewing objects the commercial break becomes a zone for potential renegotiation of the viewing schedule, and possibly leading to a downright shift in the control of the social viewing. In approaching the commercial break feelings of unease is popping up to the surface. Given the unsolicited nature of the break, a household member can hardly deny other household members’ wishes to check out another program or the latest score without the risk of stirring up a scene. The informants Sarah and Sue are representative for other informants when they talk about this uneasiness that can arise when there is a clash of viewing interests between household members:

Researcher: ... So what are you watching? The ads come on and what happens?

Sarah: OK. You might be really clued into a program like Friends, for example, and like the boys will have already canvassed you like earlier in the evening: ‘Oh, there’s like a soccer game on later... that we planned to watch, you know... Can we have a

look?’ And you’ll be like half hoping that they’ll forget about it in the course of the evening [everybody laughs]. And so then you’ll have these half promises, where they’ll go ‘I’ll just check the score’ and it’s just like...

Sue: Once they get onto it you’ll never get the power back.

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

To let the other opposing side of the group use the commercial break to check out the program that they want they prefer to watch is associated with the fear of losing the power over the viewing schedule. There is a dilemma involved in this. On the one hand the code of behavior entails that the commercial break is a space where other activities are given priority, thus implying that in refusing another viewer the right to check something out while engaging in for example social interaction with other viewers would be considered impolite. On the other hand in complying with the code of behavior a viewer might risk losing the control over the chosen viewing experience.

Researcher: How does that make you feel about the ads? I mean if you are watching, let’s not say Friends because everybody is watching that, but a girly program for want of a better word. And you know these guys want to watch the sports, how does it make you see the ads when the ads come on during those [occasions]?

Sarah: Well to be honest the ads are not something I was interested in. It is more to do, with the loss of control, if you guys, [watch] what you want to I am not really able to watch what I want to. Er... I guess the ads are just going to be a vehicle for them to take control to as opposed to...

(Interview excerpt from the Mixed Multiple Adult household)

Sarah even identifies the commercial break as a vehicle for taking control over the viewing experience. Sarah argues that when there are conflicting viewing schedule between the female members and male members of the household, the male members are using the commercial break as a way to seize control over the schedule by verbally

stating the pretext that the change of channels will be restricted to the intermission of the programming. However, despite the alleged limitation in duration this overthrow of power can turn out to have more permanent implications for the viewing schedule. Due to the meaning of the commercial break as time freed to other activities, the arrival of a break might actually bring on a legitimate arena for issues of power and control to surface. The culturally bounded norms and rituals about how to behave during the space of the commercial break makes it difficult for a viewer to deny requests, from other viewers, for interim access to the control over the viewing experience. The commercial break becomes a space for negotiation.

The home hosts, as previously discussed, a highly symbolic environment (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1999). Not only does it offer an arena for complex and dynamic social processes and interactions, it is also housing a number of everyday tasks that need to be performed in order for the household to function smoothly. In a time with increased privatization of leisure the home also provides a space for entertainment activities of different kinds. In entering this multifaceted environment the commercial break encounters obstacles in trying to capture the attention of the potential audiences for advertising. The unsolicited commercial messages are competing for the attention of the viewer with a magnitude of other external and internal influences.

Researcher: Well when the ads are on. I mean you might be leaving do to something else. What else are the typical activities?

Katherine: I might go and let the dog out in the garden.

Michael: Go to the loo.

Katherine: Go to the loo, yes. Turn the washing on. Turn the dishwasher on.

Researcher: It's an obvious question, but why wait until the program has ended, or is in a break?

Katherine: Because the program is interesting, but the adverts we think won't be. There's no point in staying to watch them. You might as well go and do something. Rather than waste that three minutes or so.

(Interview excerpt from the Adams household)

With such an intricate and symbolic environment follows the idea that 'time freed' is time that should not be wasted. Engaging in watching the advertisement is thus a motivated act. However, television viewing takes place in a household context and there are numerous reminders of the life world and everyday life that we are immersed in. The commercial break serves as a catalyst for resolving the state of guilt associated with indulging in watching programs when there are other things that need to be taken care of. The commercial break is also a moment in time to which the viewer can postpone activities and needs that do not require immediate attention. The activities or tasks associated with life world and everyday life occurs both within and outside the living room space. Depending on the position of the advertisement in the particular advertising pod, an advertiser might continuously end up broadcasting its message for an empty room.

At the same time the household context can actually bring the viewer into watching an advertisement. Consuming food or drink at the same time as performing other behaviors is hard to master. Watching the television screen is the behavior that compromises the capability of consuming food and drinks the least, since it is only requiring the viewer to keep a regular eye contact with what is happening on the screen in order to succeed in the sense making process. Even when a viewer is engaged in inter medium activity as reading a newspaper at the same time as drinking a cup of tea the viewer is likely to look up on the screen when it is time to grab a hold of the cup, glass or plate. In this way they are catching glimpses of what is going on in the advertisement.

Not only might the comforts of the household bring us in and out of the watching advertising. Everyday life can also lead viewers into advertising interaction. This can be exemplified with the below episode from the multiple female household where Celia and Jack (the boyfriend of Bea) are lounging in front of the television awaiting

the soap opera Coronation Street to start anew. At the same time Bea is in the kitchen preparing some food. Bea's question if somebody wants to have a glass of wine becomes the ignition of first Jack's then Celia's reading of the ongoing advertisement and the subsequent advertising interaction that takes place:

It is 19.43. The end of the commercial break is approaching (intra program break of Coronation Street). Celia is sitting in the armchair eating throughout the break. Jack is lounging on the sofa. Bea is out in the kitchen. There has been communication going on between the living room and the kitchen. An ad for the retailer Sainsbury's comes on [*The celebrity British chef Jamie Oliver is seen walking around the deli counter of a Sainsbury supermarket carefully picking up groceries. He then gets back home and eats what he has purchased together with some friends.*]. Throughout the first couple of frames of the advertisement the room is silent. Suddenly Bea asks from the kitchen:
"Does anybody want a glass of wine?" Celia responds:
"No, thank you!" Then Jack fills in:
"I am saving mine for now." Bea continues from the kitchen:
"I'd like a glass of wine." Jack replies to Bea:
"Would you?" He then reaches for the remote control and mutes the sound. From the kitchen Bea continues:
"Anyway you are going to see Paul tomorrow?" Jack continues:
"Okay, then... I would like to have some of the sun blushed tomatoes, that I missed." Bea, still from the kitchen addresses Celia:
"Have you tried those Celia, they are delicious!" Celia turns her head towards the opening to the kitchen:
"Mmm..." Jack says:
"I have to say I don't like Sainsbury's delicatessen." Bea from the kitchen disagrees with the latest comment:
"I think that the food is really good." Celia now referring to what is displayed on the screen:
"It looks really good actually." Jack goes on:
"Even if I don't like Jamie Oliver..." Celia says with a giggle:
"Is that why you turned the sound off? Loads of blokes don't like him, do they? Bea still from the kitchen:
"Helen is obsessed by him. She loves him. She practically cries when he is on TV." Coronation Street starts again. Jack puts the sound back. Jack and Celia start watching the screen again.

(Observational notes from the Multiple Female household)

In the above example everyday life and the advertisement feed into each other. Even though Jack mutes the sound as to not hear the voice of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, the group carries on discussing the products of the advertiser (Sainsbury's) as well as the spokesperson for the brand (Jamie Oliver). The query about the wine directed Jack to think about food and beverages. In seeing food on the television screen at the same time reminded Jack about a particular kind of product that he wanted to taste and that he knew his girlfriend had in the fridge (namely Sun blushed™ tomatoes from Sainsbury's). This, in turn, spurs on Celia's interest in the advertisement and the ongoing advertising interaction. Life world and everyday life, and advertisements have the capacity to feed into each other. This can happen in a relatively direct way as in the case above where the actual product in lived life and the product as featured in the advertisement intermingle. It can also happen in an indirect way as when the product featured in an advertisement spurs on a conversation about the product. In this way the advertisement serves as a reminder of an incident or a wish for something in lived life. This reminder then ignites the conversation into an everyday life topic:

Researcher: Does it make you talk about it [advertising]?

Bea: We were talking about Bailey's earlier on and I suppose that was probably...if an advert came on, we would definitely have a whole conversation about Bailey's and how Anna's dad is going to France and we can get some Bailey's for Christmas. And you never would have thought of that without the advert sparking it off. Would you? I think probably not.

(Interview excerpt from the Multiple Female household)

The household context in which potential audiences for television advertising can be found will both affect if and how much attention these audiences will direct to the advertisements, and also taints the readings and interpretations of the commercial messages that they choose to encounter. In order to get a deeper understanding of the cultural phenomenon, consumption of the commercial break, it is pertinent to recognize the cultural meaning of the commercial break. It is in the light of this cultural meaning that viewers choose to engage in the different cultural behaviors:

Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction, Tasking, Reading, Zapping and Advertising Watching. The taxonomy of cultural behaviors during the consumption of the commercial break will not be complete without taking into account the contingencies, discussed previously in this chapter. Moreover, it is important to stress the fact that cultural behaviors can not be regarded as static and compartmentalized, and instead embrace the notion of flow of behaviors in order to acknowledge the complexity of this cultural phenomenon. Vital to the understanding of the consumption of the commercial break is also the assumption that advertising reception can not be reduced to the dichotomy of viewing versus non-viewing, but rather that it is a matter of a continuum of the attention level in the consumption of advertising. Finally, a broader discussion on the cultural meaning of the commercial break was presented.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Chapter 6 served as a qualification of the taxonomy developed in Chapter 5 on the cultural phenomenon of consuming the commercial break. This final chapter provides a discussion of the empirical findings reported in the previous chapters. The chapter starts with a summary of the study and of the findings, before moving on to a section where the thesis is discussed in relation to the existing body of literature. The chapter then discusses the theoretical and practical implications of this research. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Main Findings

This thesis is an investigation into the phenomenon of the consumption of the commercial break and is positioned within the interpretive consumer research paradigm. It aims to re-contextualize the viewer of television advertising and is exploring the phenomenon in a naturalistic setting where different contextual factors come into play. The ethnographic method is used to study behavior in “real life” by a data collection consisting of a combination of observations and interviews, and provides a tool for furthering our understanding of the consumption of the commercial break and the potential audience of television advertising. This thesis has benefited

from the general 'ethnographic' turn (Moore 1993) in other areas of media research, as well as from the body of ethnographic work within interpretive consumer research.

Eight households in Northwest London were filmed during a two-week-period. The households were selected to represent a wide spectrum of household types ranging from single parent to empty nesters to young flat sharers. The households were varying in age, socio-economic factors, size and composition. The number of informants was 30. Data from the first week of filming was discarded due to the assumption that the perceived obtrusiveness of the presence of a camera would decrease with time. The possibility to revisit the recordings over and over again makes the visual method a powerful tool to capture social interaction. Sometime after the end of the filming the households were visited for a group interview during which the informants were shown a number of clips from the filming of their behavior during the commercial breaks. This served as a basis for discussion. This discussion was then taped and transcribed. All clips from the commercial breaks were also transcribed. The data was then analyzed through a hermeneutic circle, an iterative procedure where the collected material was probed from parts-to-whole and from whole-to-parts. Through this hermeneutic process six cultural themes were crystallized. When consuming the commercial break the consumer can engage in six different behaviors. These behaviors are Social Interaction, Advertising Interaction, Tasking, Reading, Zapping and Advertising Watching. In the thesis these cultural themes are illustrated by behavioral episodes and interview excerpts from the participating households. During social viewing, people can try to initiate some kind of social interaction during the commercial break. These social interactions vary from mere physical ones to more elaborated verbal exchanges. At times advertisements provoke some kind of reaction from the audience. In social viewing situations it happens that advertising feeds into the conversational processes in the shape of advertising interaction. Tasking during the commercial break take place as a part of the fulfillment of basic needs or as a part of management of the household chores. Consumers can also make use of some alternative media during the commercial break. This kind of reading activity is undertaken as to receive some kind of gratification while waiting for the program to start again or for a new program to commence. To engage in zapping means using the remote control in order to check what is on other channels or what is going on in a particular program or a particular channel. Finally,

the consumer can choose to continue watching the television screen in silence when the commercial break comes on, advertising watching.

The type of behavior that a consumer will engage in at a given moment is dependent on contextual variables. Although a consumer can be prone to engage in a particular behavior, contextual factors such as the presence of others, the composition of the people present, and the time of the day may alter the consumer's behavior. Moreover, the consumer can exhibit a flow of behavior throughout the course of an evening, a commercial break, or even for the duration of one particular advertisement. If more than one consumer is present in the room, the flow of behavior of one consumer will feed into the behavior of the other consumer/consumers and vice versa. There is no dichotomy of viewing versus non-viewing. Rather it is a matter of a continuum of attention being paid to what is happening on the television screen. Of course there are black and white cases of viewing and non-viewing, but most incidents can be found somewhere along the continuum.

Situating the Study

This study was undertaken as a reaction to the lack of work in advertising research on the role of the contexts of viewing as well as to those fields of media research, for example cultural studies, that study naturally occurring media consumption but that do not have the commercial break as a focal point of their research. This study was undertaken in order to complement these traditions by studying the phenomenon of the consumption of the commercial break in a naturalistic setting. The cultural themes and the set of contingencies identified, in addition to insights on the cultural meaning of the commercial break, provide a new and more complete picture of the phenomenon than previously available.

As a scholar or practitioner with an interest in advertising it is easy to overlay advertising's role in the everyday life of consumers. Although consumers encounter a large number of commercial persuasion attempts every day, at the same time they encounter an infinite number of other kinds of communication and information

attempts. In this information society, consumers have to filter the information in order to upkeep the sense making processes. Moreover, the everyday life of the consumer consists of a myriad of demands and choices. For the consumer in the everyday world who needs to prioritize among countless alternatives of information sources and competing demands for her attention, advertising will at best be of minor importance. This thesis has an audience-centered rather than an advertising-centered approach. In an audience-centered perspective, advertising is merely one thing among others that might influence the behavior of the consumer. In an advertising-centered perspective, the focal point is the advertising and what it does, or does not do to the consumer. In an audience-centered perspective, the focal point is instead the viewer and what it does, or does not, do *with* the advertising message (Buttle 1991; Lannon and Cooper 1983). When adopting an audience-centered view the researcher must acknowledge that advertising, even though omnipresent in the Western part of the world, is of minor importance in the everyday life of people. Television advertising enters the context of the home, a highly symbolic place. Television advertising is an uninvited feature of the viewing experience. The commercial breaks can be either welcome or unwelcome by the viewer. Nevertheless, regardless of whether welcome or unwelcome, the commercial break is there, and the viewers have to adapt their behavior to this fait accompli. Advertising watching is merely one behavior to engage in among others, and is by no means the default activity. To engage in other kinds of behaviors is not a matter of avoiding advertising, but rather of managing the break from the chosen viewing experience. Stressing advertising avoidance would again would imply an advertising-centered perspective. From the audience's perspective it is not a matter of trying avoiding being persuaded by commercial messages, but rather of making something of the break from the chosen viewing experience.

An advertising-centered view on the consumption of advertising leads the researcher to overplay the influence of advertising in the real world. The problem is not limited to any particular stream of research. Clearly it is relevant to advertising research, where the lonely viewer is encountering advertisements in an acontextual vacuum, but also to the interpretive consumer research tradition albeit relevant for different reasons: limitations of method versus theoretical tools. The dominance of methodological individualism as a method of inquiry has led to a disproportionate amount of advertising research solely devoted to the advertising-viewer dyad (Mick

1992). Within the interpretative consumer research tradition, the adaptation of, for example, reader-response theories developed for the consumption of literary works to advertising consumption (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999; Stern 1996) has meant an over-emphasis on the interpretive effort and involvement that goes into an advertising encounter.

Theoretical Implications

This dataset provides a rich insight into various research streams. These are described in the remaining of this section. The research was performed in order to provide an investigation into the behaviors occurring during the commercial break in a naturalistic setting. During this pursuit a number of more specific theoretical insights emerged. In this study the informants did not give voice to more sophisticated interpretations of advertisements in the way suggested in the reader-response type of research (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999; Scott 1994). This dataset gives no evidence to the existence of such active and creative consumers, seemingly eager to decode and deconstruct meanings they see in advertisements as found in advertising-centered research (e.g., Friestad and Wright 1994; Mick and Buhl 1992; Scott 1994). Needless to say, there are no cases of different interpretations being debated. There are thus no incidences of polysemic readings that occur when two audiences have different interpretations of the events described in a text (Cecarelli 1998). There might be different explanations for this lack of sophisticated interpretations of advertisements in naturally occurring viewing situations. One possible explanation is that viewers do not interpret the advertisements in the way that a reader of a book would interpret what she is reading. The reader of advertising does not immerse herself in the reading of an advertisement as the reader of a book would. Another possible explanation is that viewers are not interested in sharing their interpretations with each other. A third explanation is that viewers in a group believe that they would share the same interpretation and therefore it would be unnecessary to bring it up as a topic of conversation. Naturally occurring advertising interaction at the time of the reception was short in nature and confined in time to when the advertisement is broadcast. Moreover, rather than to take the form of interpretation, the comments are evaluative

in nature. In briefly declaring an evaluative standpoint of a particular advertisement the informant is using the advertisement as a token of social exchange. One person's comment on a particular ad can lead to some kind of confirmatory response from the other people present. This type of evaluative dialogue serves to reinforce the sense of shared identity within the interpretative community (Ritson and Elliot 1999). There seem to be a consensus regarding advertising evaluation, or at least nobody is openly challenging the opinions of others. In the present study there are no examples of occasions where a reviewing comment made by a household member is being challenged by the other viewers. There is thus no incidence of "polyvalence" (Condit 1989), occurring when two audiences have the same interpretation of a text but diverging opinions. At a more general level, this discussion makes us ponder on whether the methodological instrument of in-depth interviewing found in interpretive research may to a large extent be responsible for the rich variations of interpretations that arise in these kinds of papers. This probing for deep interpretations might even be parallel to the issue of self-generated validity (Feldman and Lynch 1988) in survey research.

This research is relevant to the body of literature on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1986). This model of attitude change postulates the existence of two distinct routes to persuasion described as central and peripheral (for a summary of the theory see Petty et al. 1983). The ELM model enjoyed its heydays in the 1980's and is still much relied upon by consumer researchers. As an evidence of this, Petty et al.'s (1983) seminal article has since 2000 been cited 78 times within marketing publications (Social Science Citation Index). This thesis challenges the notion of what constitutes peripheral versus central cues. From these data it emerges strongly how it is impossible to identify a priori any advertising cue as central or peripheral. For example, in many instances the "central" message claim is ignored and instead in the center of the advertising interaction are "peripheral" cues such as music, a garment, or a facial feature of one of the cast members. The main reason for this misled focus is a lack of understanding of the meaning of the commercial break. It is a motivated act to engage in Advertising Watching and Advertising Interaction. What a viewer chooses to comment on is a central cue for her at that particular moment. To conclude that a viewer has miscomprehended the commercial message due to a lack of involvement in the product being advertised would be to assume that a viewer

always is reading advertising as a *consumer*. This dataset shows numerous examples where Advertising Watching and Advertising Interaction are undertaken for entertainment or conversational purposes. In these instances viewers are not watching the advertisement as a part of an active search for information, but rather for the sake of entertainment or for conversational purposes. What meaning viewers bring with them from the viewing experience is based on what is deemed central by them at the moment of reading. An advertiser might hope for the intended meaning, the preferred meaning, to be acquired by the television audience much like an artist might hope for the art audience to interpret his work in the way she intended. However, the focus will differ based on what the viewer brings into the process. The purpose of the viewing will affect the attention devoted to specific cues. Consider the difference between consuming the advertisement as a reviewer or as a consumer. In the role of the reviewer the viewer chooses to evaluate the advertisement from an aesthetic point of view. In the role of the consumer she will focus on the category, offer, product or brand.

Earlier we discussed how the data suggest caution in stressing the centrality of advertising in consumers' lives. The remote control is an example of empowerment that aids the viewer in the management of the viewing experience. The remote control has altered the nature of the commercial break because it makes it easier to perform a number of functions without even leaving the couch. In the dataset there are several incidents where informants are using the remote control in order to mute the sound during the commercial break as to facilitate the Social Interaction. Moreover the remote control is also used as a tool for Reading and Zapping. An interesting topic for future research would investigate how the introduction of the personal video recorder (PVR) will affect the consumption of the commercial. With this new technology it is possible for the viewers to skip the commercial break in real time and also admits advanced time-shifting which makes it possible for the viewer to choose when to watch a particular program. Time-shifting has already been used in a more basic way by utilizing video recorders (VCR). With VCRs it has been possible to record a program and view it at a later time, and also fast forward the commercial break. However, the ease and sophistication of time-shifting with a PVR is bound to have more profound effects on the viewing behaviors.

The remote control has in the field of cultural studies been discussed in terms of a display of masculine power and as an important part of the politics of the family (e.g., Morley 1986; 1992). In this literature it is assumed that having the possession of the remote control is a positive thing. However, from the data it emerges that the connotation of power might be different in social viewing situations where viewers are tied together by friendship or by flat sharing, rather than by family ties. In such circumstances the remote control could be something of a hot potato. Rather than feeling empowered by the possession of the remote control, the holder of the 'power' actually feels the stress of being responsible for the viewing experience of the group as well as being stripped from the freedom to choose the channel because she feels obliged to take into account the wishes of the fellow viewers as well as the rules of conduct of appropriate behavior during hours of social viewing. The remote control emerged in the data as a powerful instrument for regulating the power structure within a group, but the pattern of behaviors suggests a more complex role than previously suggested. This more nuanced notion of power within the boundaries of the commercial break provides insights into the behavior of television viewing and hence contributes to the field of cultural studies.

From the data, it emerged clearly that there are two ways of understanding the commercial break as a tasking forum: the commercial break as an opportunity creator versus the commercial break as a guilt reducer. The household context serves as reminder of the everyday issues that the viewer is surrounded by. The commercial break, by punctuating the viewing experience, spurs off thoughts about what tasks need to be performed. In the view of the commercial break as an opportunity creator, the break symbolizes an opportunity to undertake what is needed without missing anything vital. In the view of the commercial break as a guilt reducer, the break symbolizes an obligation, a sort of a rude awakening from the program experience. By getting immersed into the program the viewer creates a personal space for herself where she is allowed for a brief moment to forget the daily demands and pressures (Radway 1984). The finding that certain people regard the commercial break as a temporal space for guilt reducing contributes to the body of literature within consumer research on guilt (e.g., Thompson 1996). Moreover, the polysemic notion of how to relate to the commercial break adds a facet to the meaning-based models within advertising research (e.g., Mick and Buhl 1992). Meaning-based advertising research

focuses on variations of interpretations of specific advertisements by using life themes and multilayered interpretation. The findings of this study provide important examples of how things outside advertising affect behavior. Not only will the outside element affect how you read a particular advertisement, but it can also affect if you will read it at all.

The findings of this study also highlight the need for taking into consideration the impact that time can have on behavior. Advertising research traditionally considered advertising consumption as occurring in a temporal vacuum. The data, however, clearly show an increase in the amount of advertising watching later in the evenings. The natural rhythms of the environment and of the body are important drives of social life (Adam 1995). When bedtime is approaching the viewers become tired and they engage less in behaviors that require energy. Even during social viewing situations the later the time the greater the amount of viewing is taking place. Late night viewing also coincide with a lower tasking activity level. Generally the household chores have already been taken care of and later in the evening the viewer feels that she can relax without feeling too much guilt. This research shows that there are rich insights to be gained by considering the role of time in the investigation of consumption phenomena.

In the data, even when alone, people utter words and make sounds (e.g., sighing or giggling) or make conspicuous body movements (e.g., shaking heads or rolling their eyes) as a response to advertisements. It is interesting to speculate on the meaning of such behaviors. One possible explanation for this solo talking is that vocal expressions are automatic during evaluative judgments and that such vocal expressions therefore represent spontaneous responses to the advertisements. In other words, viewers think aloud. This kind of response to advertising would then be considered as the most *honest* response since the response involves no impression management or social desirability concerns. This explanation might find support in the psychology literature where the close relationship between speech and thought is often stressed (e.g., Kim 2002). A second explanation for such solo response is that the response provides a rehearsal of the social act. Cognitive processes can be influenced by the anticipation of a group discussion (e.g., Shlosser and Shavitt 2002; Augustinova et al. 2005). Solo talking then could be serving as an opportunity for rehearsing advertising interaction

in anticipation of social viewing situations. A third explanation for the solo talking is that the viewer is reacting to people in her head. The viewer is talking to an imagined audience (Fisher and Dubé 2005; Garcia et al. 2002). For example, a man that is usually watching television with his wife encounters an advertisement when he is watching alone and reacts to it just as if the wife was sitting next to him. A different explanation for solo talking is the perception-behavior link. We often automatically perform behaviors that we observe in others (Dijksterhuis et al. 2000; Chartrand and Bargh 1999). The spoken language of television advertising might therefore induce people to speak aloud when alone. This would explain occasions when people repeat what is said on TV or the imitation of postures. However, this explanation portrays a rather mindless process and does not therefore fit all cases (e.g., saying “this is crap” when watching an ad alone). A fifth explanation for this solo talking is that the viewer is actually talking to the researcher. However, the range of non-socially appropriate behaviors displayed in combination with the decision taken prior to the filming to discard the first week’s data makes this explanation unlikely. This explanation is further discredited by the lack in the data of changes in body posture as to address the camera or the microphone. Further research is needed to investigate this phenomenon.

Another important insight that emerges from the data is the existence of a social convention of appropriate conduct during commercial break in hours of social viewing. According to cultural norms and rules of interaction, during social viewing the commercial break is a time set aside for interaction. Viewers are, during social viewing situations, obliged to turn their attention away from the screen and instead direct it to their fellow viewers. This redirection of attention also involves providing eye contact of some sort with the other viewers. The kind of viewing that might occur then takes the form of monitoring in which the viewers throw occasional glances to the screen. A viewer needs to have satisfactory reasons to engage in other kinds of behaviors when watching together with other people. To put it crudely, the social conventions “force” people to talk when the advertising comes on. It is not regarded as appropriate behavior to continue watching in silence. In fact, to opt to continue watching the screen in silence can be used as a tool for avoiding contact (Bausinger 1984). Fellow viewers interpret the behavior as a non-verbal statement in the ongoing social processes. A possible way for the viewer to avoid being labeled as rude while continue to focus on the screen is to engage the other viewers in some kind of

advertising interaction. However, this requires the viewer to move from a silent mode to a conversational mode. On the part of the other viewers such attempt at advertising-related conversation must be acknowledged by some kind of reciprocated action. A non-reaction to the attempt of advertising interaction would be considered impolite, much in the same way as it is considered rude not to respond to attempts of social interaction. Nevertheless, social interaction has precedence over advertising interaction. The second is deemed lighter in substance. The above discussion shows that the social context is important for how the viewers behave during the commercial break. The social context not only affects how advertising will be watched and discussed, but also if such activities will take place. This discussion provides a new insight into advertising consumption.

This research also provides a contribution to the marketing literature on program involvement (e.g., Lord and Burnkrant 1993; Park and Young 1986). It emerges from these data that high program involvement can spur off a program-specific conversation during the commercial break that leads to the advertisements being ignored. Characters, stories and themes from programs are used as facilitators of conversation (Lull 1980). In the study this kind of conversation arises in combination with programs that are shown on a regular basis and that contain fictional or real characters that the viewers can relate to. Examples are a sit-com like *Friends* or a reality-soap like *Big Brother*. Lengthier types of comments or discussions are kept on hold until the commercial break comes on as to not ruin the viewing experience for oneself and the other co-viewers. Previous research has shown that there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between program involvement and ad memory and attitudes towards advertising (Tavassoli et al. 1995). The U-shaped relationship is being explained by theories of arousal. These data do not only replicate this finding, but also bring additional insight by highlighting the effect that the social context can have on program involvement and the subsequent effect on potential advertising processing. Not only will high program involvement in an alone condition lead to lower ad memory and attitudes towards the advertisement, but a high program involvement in a social viewing condition might bring about the commercial break being completely ignored as a consequence. Programs that enjoy high viewer ratings, but at the same time provoke high program involvement might not be optimal to advertise within due to this “Friends” effect.

Managerial Implications

The dataset provides a source of input to marketing practice, especially in the area of advertising and media planning. Although these insights concern variables that might be considered to be outside the realm of copywriters and media planners, these influences from “outside the black box” (McCracken, 1990, p.3) are of importance and ought not to be overlooked for successful advertising effects. As stated previously, in multi-member households much television viewing takes place with more than one household member present. This social dimension of television viewing has consequences for what is likely to happen during the commercial break. The data show that the commercial break during social viewing situations is defined as a time set aside for interaction where there is a pressure to engage in social interaction. This uncovering of social norms related to advertising viewing has important practical implications. The advertiser needs to take into consideration this social dimension of potential advertising consumption in media planning activities. More specifically, the use of prime time viewing hours might not be optimal if the advertiser wants the viewer to pay focused attention on what is being advertised, since these hours are commonly associated with active social viewing situations. This thesis therefore challenges prevailing managerial beliefs about media planning and suggests that an excessive focus on reach may be undesirable.

Moreover, certain types of prime time television, like sit-coms and reality soaps, are likely to generate high program involvement. In social viewing situations, this high program involvement has deleterious implications for the effectiveness of the commercial break. The commercial break in these situations is spent delving into the characters, personalities, stories and themes of the program. Thus programs that enjoy high viewer ratings, but at the same time provoke high program involvement, might not be optimal to advertise within due to this carryover effect that we could term the “Friends” effect.

However, several informants stated that they would not risk missing a single moment of the programs that they are highly involved in. This aspect was especially apparent for sitcoms where one might risk missing out on a final punch line if one for example chooses to zap to another channel or exits the room for a toilet visit too early. This

finding suggests the importance of advertising in proximity of the programming content (e.g., program sponsorship) instead of advertising within an advertising pod.

Time plays an important role in how people will behave during the commercial break. When people are watching alone, they display a marked tendency to engage in more advertising watching as the evening progresses. Late in the evening all household chores have been dealt with or there is no energy left to take care of them. Even the most avid surfer zaps less later at night. Even during social viewing there is an increase of advertising watching as the evening draw to the end. As people get more tired they also become less eager to communicate with each other during the commercial break. For the advertiser this means that, although one might not reach the largest potential number of viewers during the later hours of viewing, one can expect more viewers to actually watch the screen for the full length of a commercial break.

Another issue concerning time is the predictable structure of the commercial break of different television channels. Due to the comprehension of the logics of commercial television when it comes to “how often”, “when channels are going for commercial break” and for “how long these breaks are going to last”, viewers have come to use more or less elaborate rituals in order to manage the tasking during the breaks. The viewers do not risk missing anything of the program because they know when to zap back or to come back from the kitchen in time to start watching the program again. By alternating the format of the commercial break randomly (doing it after a specific schedule would soon have the viewers identifying the pattern and adapt their behavior accordingly), more advertisements would probably be watched because the viewers would not like to miss the programming and thereby zap back more often or cut their visits to the kitchen shorter.

It generally seems a better idea to place an advertisement in an intra-program break than in an inter-program break, if the television channel has not succeeded in creating a ‘silent block.’ The ‘silent block’ illustrates a “folk” term for a temporal period extended over several programs in which the viewers are content with a specific channel’s offering and do not consider channel switching of any kind. Inter-program breaks stand a better chance to be watched, or at least to be the breaks that will be

partly attended to, because the viewers do not want to risk missing parts of the program. Inter-program breaks are a point for renegotiation of the viewing schedule and zapping is conducted in order to change to another pre-planned program or to check out, and evaluate, other potential viewing experiences.

In this study it became apparent that the consumption of television advertising cannot be regarded as a dichotomous phenomenon. This means that it is not always a straightforward matter to categorize behavioral episodes as viewing or non-viewing or rather as processing or non-processing of the advertisements. Instead of a black and white picture there seem to be a continuous scale of attention to what is happening on the screen. Of particular importance to the discussion of low or partial attention advertising consumption is the role of sound. In many instances informants performed alternative activities during the commercial break (e.g., tasking). In these situations sounds can provide the only path to reach the consumer. Due to sounds, the consumer can for example be exposed to advertisements when performing activities outside the living room. Previous knowledge of an advertisement, or of the style usually used by the advertiser, can even lead a viewer to correctly attribute a musical element or a slogan to a specific advertiser without even watching the screen or being in the room. This means that music and spoken slogans are powerful tools in the effort of reminding the potential audiences for television advertising about a brand.

When initiating advertising interaction, the viewer takes on the role of the reviewer of the aesthetics of the advertisement (viewer/reviewer) rather than the role of the consumer of the specific product being advertised (viewer/consumer). In order to deserve being a basis for conversation and to provoke an advertising interaction something in the ad must stand out in the eyes of the viewer. This type of advertising interaction can be both negative and positive. When the viewer/reviewer discusses in negative terms some aesthetic element of the ad (e.g., the physical appearance of an actor or the soundtrack), negative associations to the brand may be limited by a lack of focus on the commercial element of the advertisement. In this sense it could be said that all attention is good attention. However, when the advertising interaction concerns a negative evaluation of the brand or the product and the viewer/consumer actually tells her co-viewer about her negative encounters with the offer or brand then the exchange becomes negative word of mouth and is likely to have deleterious

effects on the brand associations of the interaction partner. In the dataset a viewer/consumer mindset in advertising interactions was not common. The distinction between viewer/reviewer and viewer/consumer therefore delineates boundary conditions to the circumstances in which social viewing can lead to a damage to brand equity due to word of mouth. Paradoxically, it is possible that the limited prevalence of the viewer/consumer mindset should be a source of relief rather than a source of concern for the advertiser. In addition, the prevalence of the viewer/reviewer mindset lends support to the strategy of focusing on creative elements, for example sounds and humor, and distinctiveness instead of cold product claims. Related to this, as observed in the discussion of Advertising Watching in Chapter 5, novelty is an important variable in determining a viewer's level of interest and the effectiveness of a humorous copy.

Limitations

Due to the equipment used it was only possible to film during the hours that the informants stated that they usually had the television set on. If possible, it would have been preferable to film all around the clock to ensure that no potential encounter with television advertising was missed. Moreover, the equipment used required one of the household members to change videocassette once a day. It would have been less intrusive if this could have been avoided. However, in the follow-up interviews no informant commented on this or suggested that this aspect of the research design affected the viewing behavior. Using only one camera restricted what could be recorded. For example it was not possible to observe the facial expressions of a household member who turned away from the camera. Neither was it possible to follow the activities of a household member leaving the living room. In the study the equipment used was selected to be as least conspicuous as possible. The installation of additional cameras would have compromised this important aspect of the research design.

The informants' behaviors were captured during late summer and early fall. It is possible that there are seasonal differences in how people are consuming the

commercial break. However, it is likely that these differences, if they do exist, concern mostly the amount of television watched and not the nature of the consumption of commercial breaks.

As mentioned previously, most ethnographic works are conducted in public spaces. This is due to the perceived difficulty of accessing people's homes (and the fact that many phenomena can be observed outside of the private sphere). In this study the informants were filmed in the privacy of their homes. There is a possibility that people that volunteer for a study involving a camera being set up in the living room differ from others who would not agree to it. All informants live in North London and watch British television. It is possible that this could compromise the transferability of the findings to other geographical areas and television markets. However, the households were chosen to be as different as possible from each other concerning variables such as age, size, and socio economic status and the findings show that, although different from each other, all households exhibited the cultural behaviors explored. The British terrestrial television market had two advertising-free public service channels at the time of data collection. It is possible that this might have affected the attitudes and tolerance to television advertising.

As in the case of every research methodology, the current method has inherent limitations. On the one hand, the strength of the research method employed in this thesis lies in its ability to capture behavior in naturalistic contexts and in the depth of understanding that it affords. On the other hand, this implies that no direct evidence of the informants' thought process during the commercial break could be gathered.

Moreover, due to the complexity of co-occurring cues and the limited number of households, the data do not lend themselves to quantitative analyses. The aim of the research was to provide a deep understanding of consumer behavior as it naturally occurs during the commercial break. The research therefore benefited from the adoption of the interpretive paradigm as it required a careful consideration of many interrelated and co-occurring variables. This is not to say that it would not have been possible to build a quantitative representation of the observed behaviors. What was impossible was to build one such representation that fully exploited the richness of the data. In addition to these considerations, a quantification of the data would not have

been informative due to issues of sample size and representativeness. As discussed in Chapter 4, the households were not selected based on random sampling criteria, but rather through purposive sampling. This characteristic of the research design does not allow projections and extrapolations from the data. From a theoretical standpoint, furthermore, this endeavor would have been inherently futile. Within the interpretive paradigm what is important is whether a behavior occurs, not how many times it occurs. Thus, something that happens once in the data can be just as interesting and important as something that happens many times (e.g., Lincoln and Guba 1985). The goal of the thesis was to investigate the everyday consumption of the commercial break and to develop a framework that could be used as a fruitful basis for further analyses. Future research is needed to refine the current understanding of the phenomenon, for example via survey research (correlational) or experimental investigations (causal).

Final Remark

This thesis provides an investigation into the naturally occurring consumption of the commercial break. It stands clear that people do sometimes watch advertisements. At times they even talk about them or use them in a game. However, people consume the commercial break in many different ways. Television advertising enters into the context of the home, a highly symbolic place where many things are competing for the viewer's attention. As this thesis clearly shows, with a plethora of choices, demands and pressures, television advertising has a low priority in the mind of the consumer. When watching together with other people it can even be considered rude to engage in Advertising Watching or Advertising Interaction. The commercial break is indeed a break from the programming, and viewers have learned to adapt their behaviors accordingly.

Appendix 1:

An Overview of Terrestrial Television in the UK³

The broadcasting commodity exhibits certain economic features that are shared with other cultural commodities as films, books and newspapers, although others are specific for the broadcasting industry. The value obtained from a cultural commodity is immaterial, and is only transmitted through a material carrier, such as the television spectrum and the television set in the case of television broadcasting. An immaterial commodity does not get ruined through the act of consumption. Moreover, the embodiment of the meaning of cultural transactions is novelty (Garnham and Locksely 1991).

The Broadcasting Commodity

Broadcasters are the suppliers of broadcasting services, and hold the function as wholesalers or retailers of the broadcasting commodity. According to Garnham and Locksely (1991), a broadcasting commodity exhibits one of the key features for a

³ Unless otherwise stated the data in the Appendix comes from Financial Reports, and Programming Reports for BBC1 & BBC2, ITV, Channel4 and Channel5, and ITC Annual Reports on Advertising Standard Code, Code of Programme Sponsorship, Rules on Amount and Scheduling of Advertising and Programme Code.

public good. The cost of reaching yet another viewer is low to zero. The authors (Ibid) argue that, not only is the cost of reaching yet another viewer low in absolute terms, it is also low in comparison with the cost of the original prototype, and with the value that a potential viewer attaches to the commodity. Moreover, a broadcasting commodity can be reproduced instantaneously. This means that there are great potential returns to economies of scale, and that there is an ongoing strong pressure to increase audience size as well as audience share.

As a quest for novelty is the driving force of the broadcasting industry, every television program can be regarded as a prototype. Since the cost of reproduction is low to zero, the main part of the cost generally associated with the production of a broadcasting commodity lies within the domain of research and development. Every new program involves a launch of a new product for which the demand is uncertain, and thus the risk of investments is high (Garnham and Lockesly 1991). A way of reducing the uncertainty is to compile, and offer a range of products to a range of audiences within the setting of a channel. The key is getting some kind of control over the distribution, which in the case of broadcasting means having access to the transmitter.

The Viewer

There is a high risk involved for the viewer, since one can never be sure of how the program will be until after one has watched it. Therefore Garnham and Locksely (1991) argue that there is a perceived value for the viewer in reducing search time, which means that the viewer can be prepared to be loyal with a channel that can show some kind of quality control over the programming range, even under competitive conditions.

The Finance of Broadcasting

Traditionally the spectrum has been the basic scarce resource in the broadcasting industry, where broadcasters were allocated a certain part of the spectrum during a specific timeframe, and under certain conditions. However, with the rise of new distribution technologies this barrier to entry has disappeared. With the advent of cable and satellite modes of distribution, the number of channels has expanded from the original terrestrial channels to a much bigger mediascape. Digital television has started to change the broadcasting industry and will affect it further. However even in smaller countries where the cable penetration is the highest, national terrestrial channels continue to have a great impact and attract the majority of viewers (Willard 1991).

Garnham and Lockesly (1991) state that because of the public good characteristics of the broadcasting industry there would normally be no incentive for a new producer to enter the market since the marginal cost is near zero. Societies have thus developed three inefficient ways, in terms of a welfare criterion, to finance broadcasting:

- 1) Some kind of taxation for example a license fee.
- 2) Advertising.
- 3) Pay TV.

Out of these modes, the third alternative is the least efficient one in matching price to marginal cost; hence the other two alternatives are the domineering modes of financing (Ibid).

Public Service

The national broadcasting systems are all products of different historical and cultural backgrounds, and therefore tend to differ in the way they are structured (Blumler and

Nossister 1991). One also has to take into account such factors as size of population, wealth, geographical location, language/s spoken, and size of the country, when assessing for example the amount of domestic output in broadcasting or in determining the chances for the national broadcaster to participate in the world communication competition (Ibid). However, almost every country in the world, with one or two exceptions, has developed broadcasting systems that cater for a public broadcaster (Barnet and Docherty 1991). These public broadcasters vary in importance, and in the ways that they are financed. Some are financed by license fees only, others by a combination of license fees, and advertising. Yet others are financed through direct government grants, and finally some are financed through a mixture of direct government grants and advertising. No matter the chosen financing mode, public broadcasters tend to adhere to the object of providing entertainment, information, and education (Barnet and Docherty 1991). Moreover, public broadcasting should be unbiased and cater for minorities (Ibid).

In the following section we start by discussing the history of the terrestrial broadcasting market in the UK. This discussion is important to bear in mind in order to understand the present appearance of the industry, and the current legislation and the rules and codes that are directly linked to it. After that we give a brief illustration of the UK terrestrial market of today, and point out that on the terrestrial market there are only two modes of financing in existence; that of license payment, and that of advertising fees. Moreover, we examine the commission responsible for handing out the licenses for the terrestrial spectrum, and for producing and supervising the codes and rules to which the commercial terrestrial channels have to adhere. Finally, we give a brief account on the types of rules that a commercial channel has to live up to in regards to programming, advertising and sponsorship. In short, the UK terrestrial television broadcasting market can be said to be heavily regulated, and the commercial actors have a limited space of action.

History of the Terrestrial Television Market in the UK

BBC was funded in 1923 as a private radio company. However, it was chartered as a public corporation in 1927. The first BBC Television channel was launched in 1946. In 1964 BBC2 came into being. The BBC channels are financed by a license fee which is mandatory for all owners of a television set. The Television act of 1954 cancelled the BBC monopoly. A single national commercial system was established to be independent of the BBC. This system was going to produce and transmit programs. Nevertheless this system was chartered by a regulative authority, IBA, and had strict limits on the amount of advertising allowed. In 1955 ITV began broadcasting on one channel.

ITV consisted of a network of regionally organized companies, and two companies that operated on a national basis, ITN (Independent Television News), and later also TVam (that produced breakfast programming). ITV was to be founded by advertising. However the ITV had to adhere to the legally binding legislation in the IBA Code of Advertising Standard. After a Parliament approval in 1980, a second ITV channel, Channel4, was launched in 1982. Channel4 was not make its own programs, but rather to commission them from ITV companies, and independent production companies, and was to cater for minorities and innovation.

The resulting system was a duopoly characterized by centralization and control (Nossiter 1991). The ITV was controlled by the IBA, where the Deputy Chairman and 10 Members of the Authority were appointed by the Government. BBC, on the other hand, was formally controlled by the Board of 12 Governors, appointed by the Crown, but effectively under control of the executive staff of the Corporation, and the Director General who was appointed by the Board. The competition was restricted as there were two distinct sources of revenues and also legally binding regulations on the programming (Nossiter 1991). Both BBC and ITV were, for example, obliged to provide not only local and national news, but also program covering current affairs, religion, children's topics and education, and there was a restriction on what kind of content that could be shown before 9 PM. Furthermore there were quotas on the transmission on foreign programming.

In 1990 a new supervisory board (with a regulatory role and powers) for commercial television, ITC, was instated to replace the IBA. Then in 1995, the ITV companies' monopoly on the sale of advertising was broken down by the creation of yet another advertising financed national channel, Channel5. The channel came into existence after a licence auction took place. Channel4 was thereafter obliged to sell its own advertising. In 1993, ITN ceased to be solely owned by the ITV companies. The ownership of ITN became divided by Carlton Communications, Granada, Daily Mail & General Trust, United Business Media and Reuters, each with a 20% shareholding, and ITN was to provide news services to the three commercial television channels in the UK: ITV, Channel4 and Channel5.

Market Overview of the Terrestrial Channels in the UK

At the time the study was conducted five terrestrial channels were present in the UK: BBC1, BBC2, ITV (Channel3), Channel4, and Channel5. Viewing share of the terrestrial channels is around 80%, despite the growth in the number of satellite and cable channels (ITC Annual Report 2001). BBC1 and ITV1 account for the majority of viewing (54%).

Table A1.1: U.K. Television Revenue in 2001

Source	% of Revenue
Sponsorship	1%
Sale of Goods	4%
Other	5%
BBC license fee spent on TV	21%
Subscription Revenue (Cable and Satellite)	25%
Net Advertising Revenue	44%

Source: ITC

The UK market for television sets is saturated, so there is little to be done in increasing the total number of viewers. The national competition thus mostly evolves around competing for audience share. The terrestrial channels in the UK are either financed by license fees, as in the case of BBC1, and BBC2, or by advertising fees, as in the case of ITV, Channel4, and Channel5.

A way to increase revenues however is to engage into international program exports, and international out-licensing of program formats, examples of the former is BBC's *The Weakest Link* and of the latter is ITV's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*.

The terrestrial commercial channels compete for the advertisers' market, not only between themselves, but also with different cable and satellite channels. However, as can be seen from the table below the three terrestrial commercial channels hold together around 85% of the net advertising revenue. However, this, and to a limited extent sponsorship, is their only means of finance available, whereas cable and satellite channels are mainly financed by subscription or by pay per view.

Now we will briefly describe the different terrestrial channels. First we will describe the publicly funded channels BBC1 and BBC2, and then we will move over to the commercial channels that are all licence holders of their channel spectrums, and thus need to adhere to the codes and rules of the ITC.

Table A1.2: UK Net Advertising Revenue in 2001

Channel	Approx. %
ITV (Channel3)	60%
(Cable and Satellite)	21%
Channel4	20%
Channel5	5%

Source: ITC

BBC1 and BBC2

BBC1 has an audience share of 26,2% and BBC2 has 11,4%. BBC is financed by a license fee which in the year of 2001/2002 amounted to £3,533 million. Out of this money Television gets 1,372: BBC1 £962 and BBC2 £410. The Board of Governors ensure that BBC lives up to its public service obligations. As a public funded broadcaster BBC is obliged to offer programs to audiences of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. BBC also has to serve audiences in every part of the country.

ITV (Channel3)

There are 15 regional Channel3 licensees, and one licensee providing the national breakfast-time service. In addition to the consumer protection requirements, which must be met by all television program services licensed by the ITC, Channel3 licensees also have to meet significant positive requirements covering, for example, high quality, diversity, news, regional production, and the provision for the deaf or hearing impaired and blind or partially sighted. This is in accordance with the proposal made in ITV's license application to the ITC.

ITV defines itself as a mainstream public service channel that is funded by advertising revenue. ITV's share of the national audience is around 24%. ITV invests heavily in original production, and is the second largest investor of original production in Europe after the BBC. About 65% of the schedule is devoted to original programming. Moreover 25% of the programs broadcasted in a year should be independently produced. Not more than 30% of the schedule can be repeats. This is also in line with the channel's commitment to the ITC. Another side of the commitment is the responsibility to cater for regionality. There is a minimum amount of hours each week that needs to be devoted to regional programs.

Channel4

Channel4 began broadcasting in 1982. It has a statutory duty to provide information, education and entertainment; to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for

by Channel3 (ITV); to encourage innovation and experiment and to have a distinctive character of its own. A wide range of programs must be provided, and minimum amounts are allocated for news, current affairs, schools programs, and other programs of an educational nature. As in the case of the Channel3 companies, Channel4 must abide by the ITC's Codes, on technical, programs and advertising standards and practices.

Channel4 consider it self as providing a public service television channel that is funded by advertising revenues. The advertising and sponsoring revenues amounted to £645 million in 2002. Channel4's share of the national audience is around 10%. In Channel4 commitment to the ITC lies that Channel4 should be innovative and distinctive, take risks, bring educational opportunity and reflect the diversity of the British population.

Channel5

Channel5's share of the national audience is around 6%.Channel5 was awarded its license in 1995. It was awarded by competitive tender and the start of the service was in 1997.

Channel5 must provide a service of high quality and diversity according to its ITC license agreement. As with Channel3 companies and Channel4, Channel5 must abide by the ITC's Codes on technical, programs and advertising standards and practices.

To summarize, the publicly funded channels are the BBC1 and BBC2, and the commercially financed channels are ITV, Channel4, and Channel5. The BBC channels are controlled by the Board of Governors that sees to that BBC1 and BBC2 live up to the objective of public service. The commercial terrestrial channels are granted time limited licenses to operate, by the ITC, and they need to adhere to the specific conditions in each license, as well as adhere to the ITC's codes and rules on programming, advertising, and sponsorship. This restricts the commercial television channels' operating space in regards to the production of and scheduling of programs, which in turn affects the sales of the advertising space to potential advertisers. We

will now continue to make a brief introduction to the ITC and then go through some of the codes and rules concerning programming advertising, and sponsorship.

ITC

The ITC was funded in 1990 in order to replace the IBA. The organization covers editorial, commercial, and public aspects of commercial terrestrial television broadcasting. The commission issues licenses that allow commercial television to broadcast analogue and digital services to and from the UK. ITC is the organization that sets the standards for advertising, sponsorship and technical quality, and it also monitors its licensees to make sure that they adhere to the standards and also issues penalties if any of the licensees should breach the codes. Licenses are awarded by the ITC after a process of legal tender in accordance with the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996. Licenses are required to make payments to the Treasury via the ITC.

ITC's mission is to: "to set, watch over and evaluate standards appropriate to diverse audience expectations." (ITC Annual Report 2001, p.57). The Commission consists of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and up to 10 Members including National Members for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. ITC has a permanent staff of 200 people that are carrying out the commission's license and regulatory work.

ITC's objective is to strive to maintain quality, diversity, and regionality in commercial television. The codes of practices include rules on taste and decency; impartiality in news and factual programs; and misleadingness; offence and harm in advertising; and the protection of children.

The ITC have given ITV, Channel4 and Channel5 requirements in their licenses on how much of original programming they need to produce each year, as well as how much programming they need to commission from independent producers each year:

Table A1.3: ITC's Programming Requirements

Channel	% Original Programming	% Independent Programming
ITV	65%	25%
Channel4	60%	25%
Channel5	55%	25%

Source: ITC

All channels live up to, and even surpass, the requirements of the quantity of programming. Moreover, all the commercial terrestrial channels have to adhere to the codes and rules of the ITC regarding programming, advertising, and sponsorship. The codes and the rules following the codes are quite detailed. Below, we will briefly go through the key points of each code.

Program Code

The commercial terrestrial channel operators need to follow certain guidelines when it comes to what kinds of programs that can be broadcasted, and when different kinds of programs can be shown. The code also specifies the principle of objectivity, and the usage of commercial references. The thought behind the regulation is that weaker parties, such as children, need to be protected.

Restriction of the Nature of Programs to be broadcasted before 9 PM

Before 9 PM content that is not suitable for children cannot be aired. This means that the amount of violence that can be shown is heavily restricted. It also severely limits the usage of bad language. The authors of the code are firm believers of children's imitative behavior, and provide this as the reason for restricting what can be shown. There are also heavy restrictions on how much nudity and content of a sexual nature that can be aired.

Restrictions of Content at all hours

Even after 9 PM operators are obliged to issue warnings if there is a chance that some viewers might find the program disturbing or offensive. There are also restrictions on when movies that come with an age classification can be shown. Operators are restricted on types of violence (sexual, physical and psychological) that can be shown at any hour. Operators are also obliged to adhere to principles of human dignity, and consideration has to be taken to the treatment of minorities (misinterpretation and under representation), and of ethnic minorities (racist terms and stereotypes).

Impartiality

When it comes to matters dealing with industrial, public policy or political controversies, the operators need to be impartial in how this kind of content is portrayed. Moreover news presented in any form must be both accurate and impartial.

Commercial products and references

Operators are not allowed to promote commercial products and services within their broadcasts. However products or services produced by the licensee for example fact sheets, websites and help lines can be shown if they can demonstrate a relationship with the content. Books, videos etc (that the operator have the editorial responsibility for) can only be promoted at the end of a program. However such promotion has to be brief, and is restricted to mentioning of the name of the item, the cost and its availability. No third party can be mentioned as a part of such promotion. It is also carefully specified how premium rate telephone services can be used in a program, and how prizes in game shows should be presented (requirement of an informational non-promotional character).

Code of Program Sponsorship and Rules Concerning Advertising Involvement in Programs

There is also a code regarding sponsorship of, and advertiser involvement in programs. A sponsored program has had some, or all of its, costs covered by a sponsor. According to the code the sponsor must not affect the editorial independence. There must also be a clear line between sponsor credits, and advertising. Neither

visual, nor oral reference to the sponsor is allowed in the program or series being sponsored. If a program is sponsored it should be clearly identified in the beginning or at the end of the program. This sponsor credit must only create an association between the product and the sponsor, and cannot for example be using lines from advertising campaigns or pushing for the purchase or rental of the specific sponsor's goods and services. There are also restrictions on how long sponsor credits can be, and on how the sponsor credits can be integrated with the program.

Who cannot be sponsors?

There are certain organizations or companies that are not allowed to be sponsors (e.g., political bodies, tobacco producers). The code also puts restrictions on pharmaceutical companies, bookmaking, and gaming companies. There are also limits on what kind of sponsors that can sponsor a certain program or program type. This is aimed at preventing sponsors with a specific interest from influencing editorial content.

What cannot be sponsored?

A channel cannot be sponsored as a whole. Neither can elements of program services (presentation etc). There are also program that cannot be sponsored. Types of programs that cannot be sponsored are news broadcasts and current affairs programs.

Product Placement

Product placement is not permitted according to the code. Product placement can be defined as the inclusion of or a reference to a company's offering within a program that is paid for, in some form, to either the program maker or the channel licensee. Moreover, there should be no undue prominence of commercial offerings. Thus brands or products shown have to be editorially justified. Even if there are editorial reasons for using a specific product or stating a brand name, this should be severely limited.

Advertising Code and Rule of Amount and Scheduling

Moreover, there is a code concerning advertising content and quantity. The code lies on the principles that advertising shouldn't mislead, cause offence or lead to harm. It

is also specifically concerned with the protection of children. The code is also resting on the principle, that there should be a clear divide between advertising and programs.

Distinction between advertising and editorial content

Advertisements have to be clearly distinct from programming, and advertisers cannot use the kinds of executional styles that might risk confusing the viewers as to whether they are watching an advertisement or not. Moreover advertisements can not refer to programs or use titles, logos, sets or theme music from any program. Advertising breaks have to be announced in vision or in sounds: the channel is thus obliged to identify when a break is commencing and finishing. There are some programs in which advertising breaks are not allowed, for example religious broadcasts. Moreover advertising breaks are never allowed in programs that are shorter than 20 minutes.

Restriction of the amount of advertising

The amount of advertising per day cannot exceed more than an average of seven minutes per hour. For peak hours the number of minutes of advertising per hour is restricted to 8 minutes. There is also a restriction on the length of a specific break. A break cannot be longer than 3 minutes and 50 seconds.

Restriction of the placing of an ad

The channels are only allowed to insert breaks within a program where some natural interruption of the program would occur anyway. Thus for example, in a magazine style program a break can only come on between the different editorial segments that are presented in the program. The code stipulates what is the nature of a “natural break” within different program categories. Furthermore there has to be a lapse of 20 minutes between every internal break (breaks within a program). For feature films and films produced for Television the restriction is carried even further.

Restrictions on types of products or services that can be advertised

Certain commercial offerings are not deemed to be appropriate to be advertised on commercial terrestrial television channels, either because of statutory prohibition or if there is a potential harm involved. Categories that are thought to be unacceptable are products aimed at masking the effects of alcohol, betting tips, betting and gaming, tobacco products, private investigation agencies, guns & guns clubs, escort agencies,

pornography, the occult, and commercial services offering individual advice on personal & consumer problems. Moreover political advertising is not allowed. Advertising for medicines, health issues, treatments, nutrition, and financial services, alcohol, as well as for religion, faith and systems of beliefs, is heavily regulated. For example, only non prescription medicines can be advertised, and no advertisement should promote over-consumption of any kinds of food. In addition charities, dating services, home working schemas and driving standards have to live up to certain criteria.

Minimizing misleading advertising

The background to this is that the authors of the code believe that Television is a powerful medium, so advertising has to be controlled as to not misrepresent the nature, benefits and limitations of an advertising offer.

Reducing the possibilities for harm and offence

Advertisements are not allowed that cause offence that is grave or wide in regards to moral, social and cultural criteria. This puts restrictions on the usage of violence, animals in the filming, portrayal of personal distress or exploitation of the individual, and of harmful or negative stereotypes. Moreover the sound level is restricted as to not cause any harm.

Protection of children

Advertising is not allowed that is taking advantage of children's inexperience or caters for the creation of unrealistic expectations. The advertisement has to take into consideration the cognitive capacity of children of a certain age. Product characteristics have to be clearly defined (for example the size of a car or if a toy includes batteries or not). Moreover expensive toys need to be accompanied by prices. The tone of communication is also restricted. No direct pressure or unfair pressure should be communicated in the commercial messages.

It is not allowed to show advertisements for alcohol, bingo/lottery, slimming products, religion, female sanitary products, medicines, liqueur chocolates, trailers for movies with an age certificate or matches in program aimed at or likely to attract under 10-

year-olds. There are also other restrictions for program that are aimed at or are likely to attract under 18-year-old viewers.

To summarize, the terrestrial commercial operators cannot broadcast any kind of program or advertisement they want. Furthermore these channels cannot freely decide on the amount of advertising they wish to air. Neither can they freely choose what types of advertisers they wish to sell advertising space to, nor the content of particular advertisements to accept for broadcasting.

Appendix 2:

Exemplifications of the Nature of the Data

This appendix contains exemplifications of the patterns of behaviors observed in the data. The purpose is to provide the reader with a better grasp of the nature of the data. The pages below present numerical information related to some of the findings described in Chapter 5 and 6. In examining this information it is important that the reader remains aware of the epistemological stance of interpretive research.

Within the paradigm of interpretive research the aim of an inquiry is to gain an understanding of a specific phenomenon through gathering data in naturalistic settings, through purposive sampling, and with the means of an emergent design. The interpretive researcher is putting emphasis on getting more in-depth information from relatively few people in order to gain insights into the deeper meanings of a phenomenon. The interpretation of data takes place in a circular series of part-to-whole iterations. For the interpretive researcher the particular interpretation of the phenomenon is only one of many other possible interpretations.

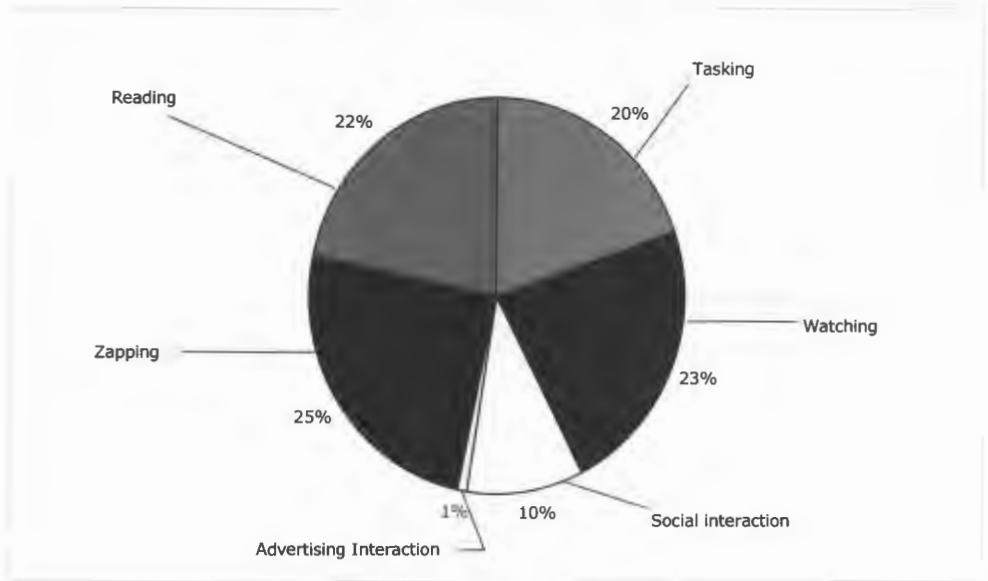
The table below shows how the 368 commercial breaks in the study were distributed between the eight households.

Table A2.1: The Number of Commercial Breaks per Households

Name of Households	Number of Commercial Breaks
Adams	35
Barnes	58
Childs	45
Drummond	42
Edwards	65
Ford	25
Female Multiple	53
Mixed Multiple	45

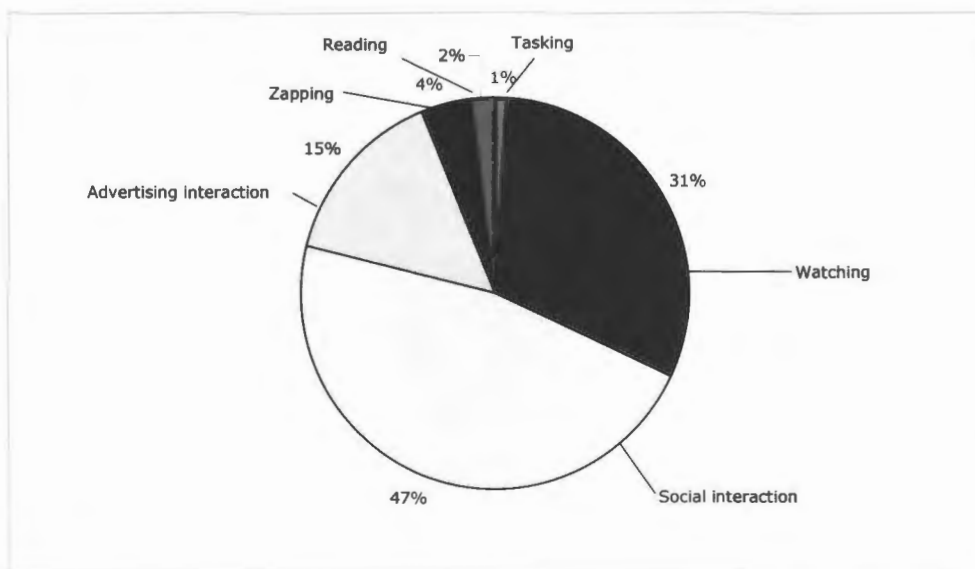
Viewers exhibit different patterns of behavior during the commercial break. Some people are engaged more in one behavior than other. Some people differ more in the behaviors that they exhibit than others. The particular mix of behaviors varies between viewers. This is exemplified below by introducing the footprints of two of the informants: Richard Childs and Anna from the Multiple Female Adult Household. The figure below represents the way Richard Childs, the retired empty nester, spends his time when the commercial break is on.

Figure A2.1: Footprints of Richard from the Childs Household



The figure below shows how Anna, one of the members of the Multiple Female Adult Household, spends her time when the commercial break is on.

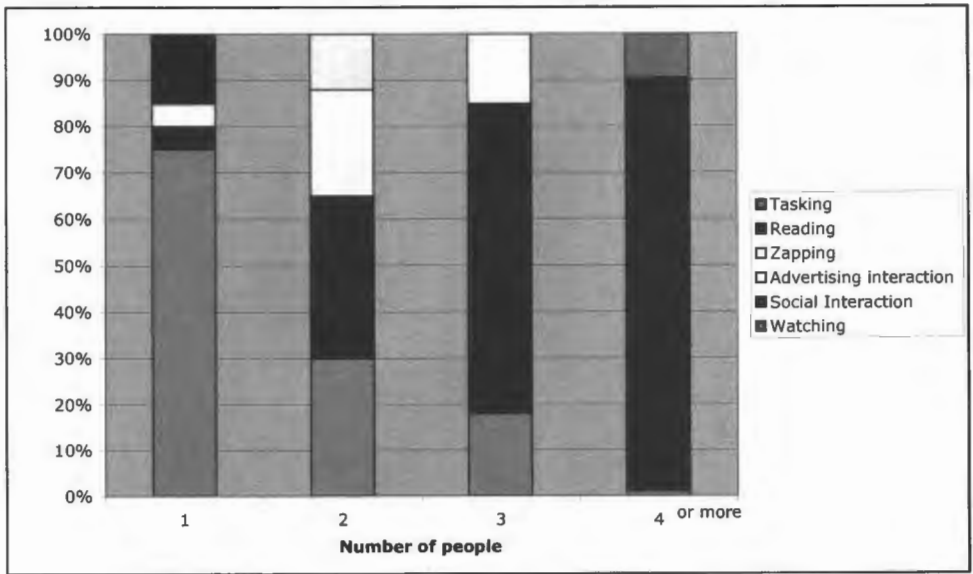
Figure A2.2: Footprints of Anna from the Multiple Female Household



Tasking might bring a viewer out of the room during the commercial breaks. This is exemplified by the number of times that Robert Edwards leaves the room during the commercial breaks, 18 out of a total number of breaks watched of 53.

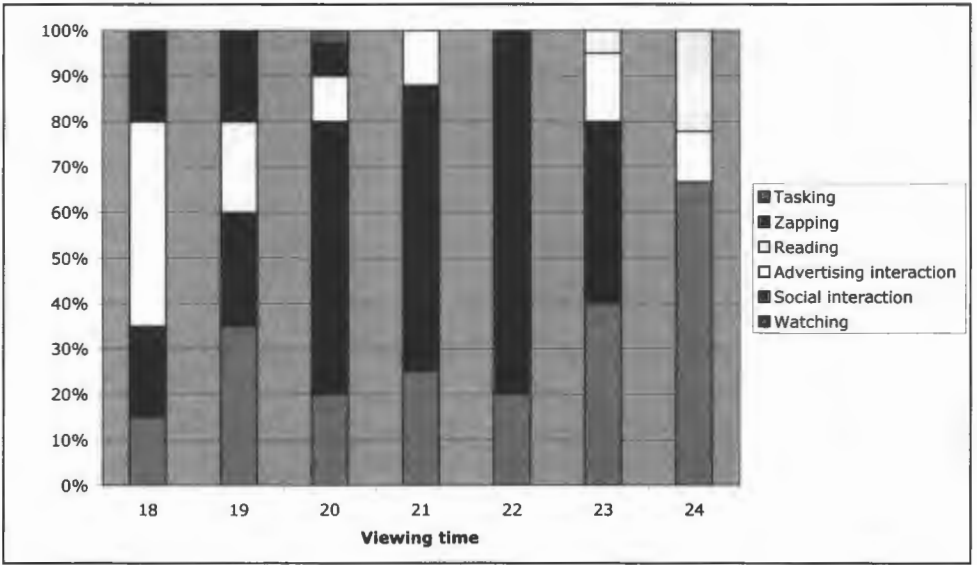
The amount of conversation going on during the program break increases with the number of people in the room. With a larger number of people watching in the room, the more likely it is that somebody will start to talk. The commercial break is defined as a time during the evening in front of the television where conversation is not only allowed but encouraged. A possible way for the viewer to avoid being labeled as rude while continue to focus on the screen is to engage the other viewers in some kind of advertising interaction. However this requires the viewer to move from a silent mode to a conversational mode. The table below exemplifies how Anna from the Multiple Female Adult Household watches less of the advertisements as the number of people in the room increases.

Figure A2.3: More People Means More Talking and Less Watching



Time plays an important role in how people behave during the commercial break. When people are watching alone, they display a noticeable propensity to engage in more advertising watching as the evening progresses. Even during social viewing episodes more advertising watching is going on as the time is approaching bedtime. As people get more tired they also become less eager to communicate with each other during the commercial breaks. The table below shows this late night effect in the case of Anna from the Multiple Female Adult Household. As the evening progresses the more advertisements Anna watches under silence.

Figure A2.4: The Late Night Effect



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