Gender Role Stereotypes in Toy Commercials

A Two-Country Comparison Based on the Level of Gender Equality

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Abstract

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Research Question: Does the advertisement industry adjust the way children are targeted according to the level of gender equality in a country, and what, if any are these differences?

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to understand how cultural differences in opposing countries influence the way the children’s toy products are advertised.

Method: A mixed methods study was carried out, coding Swedish children’s television commercials on the Nickelodeon channel. The study analysed 383 commercials and compared the results with a study by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) Progression on Nickelodeon? Gender-Role Stereotypes in Toy Commercials

Conclusion: This paper shows that in fact there is a relationship between the level of gender equality in a country and the way in which children’s products are advertised. In Sweden, the much more gender equal country according to Hofstede's dimension of Masculinity/Femininity, most commercials featured children of both genders and stereotype usage was way more rare than in the United States where also most commercials only showed solely girls or solely boys. Judging from these findings a relationship could therefore be found.
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1. Introduction

In recent years marketers have sought out ways to target children in the most persuasive and productive fashion possible. Particular strategies often used have been powerful visuals as well as the use of gender role representation. Gender role stereotypes have been a prominent part of television advertisements targeted towards children, including portrayals of both girls and boys as well as regularly displaying the contrasts between them (Bakir, Blodgett & Rose, 2008). Gender stereotypes advocate the uneven perception of males and females “in society” and differing allocation of “power and resources” throughout every phase of life (Giomi, Sansonetti & Tota, 2013, p.15). With the increased importance of gender equality, advertisers are conscious to displaying and promoting gender role stereotypes in commercials, mainly due to the large number of debates on the impact of such commercials with regards to the social conditioning of children. The issue of stereotypical gender portrayals in children’s TV advertising has been discussed as potentially influencing the way in which children view themselves and others (Bussey & Bandura, 1984; McNeal, 1992). This growing concern of the effects of such advertising has raised concerns among parents, professionals and the government.

An important feature of how a child may react to television commercials is how well they can distinguish or how it stimulates their ability to understand gender from the portrayal in the advertisement (Bakir & Palan, 2010). Similar to adults, children also establish “cognitive structures” (Ibid., p.35) that enable them to analyse and assort information regarding gender information and the roles in which both male and females play (Edelbrock & Sugawara, 1978). From the age of three most children are fully knowledgeable of gender stereotypes and such roles that each gender plays. By 10 or 11 they are able to grasp the different personality traits related to each sex (Bakir & Palan, 2010; Williams, Bennett & Best, 1975).

Advertisements with the use of gender specific content are commonplace among children’s commercials as a component that preserves gender stereotypes (Bakir & Palan, 2010). For instance, a high proportion of children's advertisements contains masculine figures, which are frequently characterized as knowledgeable and assertive (Barcus, 1977; Larson, 2001) in comparison to females (Browne, 1998). Furthermore, it has been shown that boys often show
and demonstrate the product whereas girls are portrayed collectively laughing and being somewhat bashful (Browne, 1998; Larson, 2001).

Previous research focusing on gender stereotypes in children’s advertising and the displayal of commercials gender role portrayal has largely lacked whether there is a connection between the country’s gender equality level. Gender equality is attained when both males and females have equal rights and opportunities across all aspects of life and society (Swedish Institute, 2018). The values of gender equality provide a foundation to compare both “occupational status and role behaviour” which are impacted by the sociocultural context and in particular advertisements (Eisend, 2010). Research has shown that toys very much symbolise and signify the norms and beliefs of a particular culture (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010) and the aim of this study is to investigate whether the gender role portrayals in children’s advertising reflect the gender equality of a particular country. There has not been such research conducted on a country as gender equal as Sweden and therefore this thesis will focus on Sweden. If countries such as Sweden continue to air stereotypical children’s commercials, it is important to question the influence of these on children’s view of gender and gender roles as the future generations and question whether it counteracts the on-going gender revolution. Gender roles are very much “learned during development and reinforced during everyday life” with the media and advertising industries assuming important roles in reiterating such images, as well as holding the power to display gender roles and stereotyping (Giomi et al., 2013 p.15). Conventional advertising intends to yield the most views possible and therefore frequently “play safe”, avoiding risk, displaying “a simplistic, stereotyped representation of social reality” (Ibid.). Thus the issue can be raised whether the advertising industry adapt their commercials to the level of gender equality in the target country and whether they still broadcast the same gender stereotypical children’s advertisements.

1.1 Background

Gender equality is a highly topical issue in today’s society and Sweden has been very much at the epicenter. Along with the rest of the Nordic Countries, Sweden has become renowned for being the vanguard of gender equality changes, for example having a large amount of men and women dividing the providing and caring roles in the household (Sainsbury, 1999; Hook, 2006;
Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Brandén, 2013). Sweden’s feminine society (Hofstede, 2010) further highlights the importance of the work/life balance in gender roles both inside and outside of the home.

Sweden has seen many social revolutions that have changed laws and regulations with respect to media advertising. As a result, direct advertising to children is now illegal in Sweden. Swedish regulations prohibit television commercials that are “aimed at attracting the attention of children under the age of 12” (Plogell & Sundström, 2004, p. 66). However, despite introducing a ban on children’s commercials, there are still many advertisements broadcasted through satellite TV channels from outside of Sweden, which are therefore not included in the regulations (Kucharsky, 2004). The satellite channels must adhere to the laws in the country, which they are broadcasted from and not where they are intended for. For example TV3, TV6 and Disney Channel Sverige are broadcasted from the UK and Nickelodeon Sweden is broadcast from the Netherlands (Disney Sverige, n.d.; Via Free, n.d.). As a result it enables advertising companies and broadcasters to work around the Swedish ban on children’s advertisements.

When discussing the viability of this study, concerns were raised as to whether the gender equality of Sweden can be reflected in children’s advertisements if they are not made in Sweden. However, preliminary research showed that the channels that will be researched are specifically aimed at the Swedish market as all voice overs on the adverts are in Swedish as well as many of them linking Swedish shops where one can buy the products from. Therefore, it can be assumed that the advertisements on these channels are aimed and adapted to the Swedish market. It could be said that advertisements follow a similar process when it comes to adapting to fit into different markets. Product adaptations are often made in order to make a product more appealing to a client group in a different market by changing the product according to the foreign market’s idiosyncrasies (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). This report will show whether such tendencies can also be seen in the design of advertisements.

As of 2017, Sweden’s third largest population age group was under 14’s making up 17.6% of the total population (CIA, 2017). Furthermore, of this age group an average of 48% of children aged 3-14 are watching television daily, which is roughly on par with that of 25-39 year olds (MMS,
This high number of children watching television everyday with an average viewing time of 60 minutes (MMS, 2017) fosters the consensus that the Swedish market must be a lucrative market for companies to advertise in. Therefore, it can be assumed that these adverts aired are rewarding and successful for the companies otherwise they would not continue to produce them with such high costs. This therefore means that the gender equality of Sweden can be reflected in its children’s advertisements even if there are perhaps no adverts that are made directly in Sweden or not on the public television channels. Thus it can be assumed that there are loopholes that the companies work around, such as broadcasting from other countries, therefore bypassing Sweden’s regulations on direct children’s advertising on Swedish satellite channels.

Sweden is making a big effort to reduce differences between the two different genders and the way they are perceived in society. According to the previously mentioned findings that prove the large impact of advertisements, the portrayal of gender role stereotypes in commercials could either enhance or sabotage that work at least up to a certain degree. As children are likely to be influenced by the content advertisements convey, the role of TV commercials is either supporting or damaging the on-going equality revolution in Sweden depending on how gender is portrayed in them. Due to their lack of experience and their young age, children can be regarded as being in their formative years, during which the content they are exposed to is a crucial factor. If children were not portrayed in a gender stereotypical way, that would go in line with the movement towards gender equality in Sweden, while contrary findings would make it harder to later reverse that kind of social conditioning.

In order to accomplish the purpose of this report, the subsequent research question is introduced:

*Does the advertisement industry adjust the way children are targeted according to the level of gender equality in a country, and what, if any are these differences?*

The question can be raised as to whether gender stereotypes in children’s advertisements still get shown on Swedish television, regardless of these stereotypical roles being somewhat redundant in Swedish society where men and women equally share both domestic and professional roles.
This study will focus primarily on Sweden and subsequently carry out a comparison between a previous study conducted in the U.S. by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) and reflect on the contrasts between the two countries as a follow up study. The study is conducted by mixed methods through the analysis of children’s toy commercials from 23rd April, until the 7th May 2018, analysing a total of 383 commercials. The purpose of this thesis is to uncover how cultural differences in countries with contrasting gender equality levels influence changes in children’s toy television commercials. It should be examined in how far the marketing industry reacts to whether a country with high gender equality levels emulates such equality in the portrayal of gender stereotypes in children’s commercials. Different scholars in various previous studies have addressed the topic of Gender Portrayal in children’s television commercials. Those were conducted in European, American and Asian countries and Australia. The frameworks, methods and outcomes were all different. Thus, there is still need for further research.
2. Literature review

2.1 Gender role stereotypes

The usage of stereotypes of all kinds can be described as a phenomenon that is used by humans to simplify and categorize experiences and expectations towards certain situations and behaviour of others (Ramazi, Pellerone, Ledda, Presti, Squatrito & Rapisarda, 2017). Those stereotypes sometimes prove to be true when trying to foresee or predict future actions of a person but sometimes lead to misinterpretation (Arcuri & Cadinu, 1998). The existence of stereotypes in the mind of people is due to the constant reinforcement of mechanisms concerning behaviour, language and cognition (Ibid.).

Stereotypical attributes can for example be concerned with people from different countries, with different professions but also with men and women and the differences between them. These gender-role stereotypes are also called sex stereotypes, sex-role stereotypes or gender stereotypes (Kollmayer, Schober & Spiel, 2018). Gender stereotypes define a set of shared thoughts and expectations towards the two genders’ interests, behaviour, character traits, competences and their roles and place in society (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979). There exist two different kinds of gender stereotypes: Those that are descriptive, meaning that one gender really does have certain characteristics (consensus has yet to be reached about that in science) and those that are prescriptive meaning that someone is supposed to possess a character trait (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). While woman are expected to be rather passive, caring and nurturing, men are expected to be more aggressive, dominant and success-driven (Holroyd, Bond & Chan, 2003).

These expectations do not only concern adults but also children. Ramazi et. al. (2017) find in a study with 324 parents of children aged 3-6 years that even though most of them would describe themselves as progressive and gender equal, most parents of girls prefer toys that are related with beauty, nurturance and attractiveness. Parents of boys find products associated with aggression, construction and competition most suitable for their children.
While in some cases stereotyping might not be followed by negative consequences, the manifestation of stereotypes of any kind in the mind of humans becomes harmful at a point when another being is limited in its opportunities because of them.

2.2 Advertisements as a reflection of culture

The importance of culture in the context of advertising seems undoubted and is supported by a study by Zhang (2014) that finds that one of the most researched topics in that field is ‘cultural messages in advertising’. However, whether advertisements ‘shape’ or ‘mirror’ culture has been discussed by scholars for many years and consensus has yet to be reached. Those who are convinced of the latter, postulate that in order to make an advertising endeavour a success, marketers should target potential consumers by focussing on their values and beliefs (Saleem, 2016). Thus, already existing values are reflected through advertising (Holbrook, 1987).

Advertising frequently exaggerates and highlights certain life features more than others and any revisions into commercial material undoubtedly coincides with societal adjustments rather than the other way round (Eisend, 2010). Other scholars argue that advertising “molds” the attitudes and beliefs of the viewers (Pollay, 1986, 1987). This molding thereby forms, emphasises, as well as continually strengthening gender stereotypes as a consequence to viewing such media, broadcasting and advertisements (Ganahl, Prinsen & Netzley, 2003). Continual television viewing aligns the audience’s understandings, values and beliefs more with the program than in actuality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Shanahan, 2002).

In many studies dealing with the extent to which culture is being mirrored in advertising, Hofstede’s six dimensions are used to measure culture. In most cases, either the dimensions ‘Individualism/Collectivism’ and/or ‘Masculinity/Femininity’ are studied in regards to how their scores in the researched countries could be seen as indicators for the design of the respective local advertisements (Saleem, 2016). The results of these studies show that indeed cultural values and beliefs are often portrayed in different kinds of commercials.

Using Hofstede’s dimensions of individualism/collectivism and the power distance index Alden, Hoyer and Lee (1993) hypothesise that in countries with highly collectivistic societies humour
would be more often used in-group situations than in countries that are rather individualistic and that “relationships between central characters in ads in which humor is intended are more often unequal in high power distance cultures than in low power distance cultures, in which these relationships are more often equal” (Ibid., p. 68). To test these hypotheses TV commercials from four different countries (Thailand, South Korea, Germany and the United States) with very different scores were compared. The results support the hypotheses and thus prove that culture is being mirrored in advertisements. In a country with a high power distance score an intended humorous situation could for example be set within an office environment with the two main characters being the bureau manager and his secretary. The secretary who is clearly lower in hierarchy would in this country rather be the one that is made fun of while in a country with a low power distance score the main leads would more likely be in a relationship where both persons are on the same level as for example two friends.

A year later, the same dimension was researched by Han and Shavitt (1994) in the context of print advertisements in magazines in South Korea and the United States. The aim of the study was to detect whether there is any prevalence of appeals of collectivistic or individualistic kind. The results show that cultural values are heavily portrayed in the advertisements. Individualistic appeals can more often be found in American magazines and collectivistic appeals more often in South Korea, which goes in line with the researchers’ expectations based on the countries’ respective scores.

In a more recent study, Tartaglia and Rollero (2015) investigate how far Italy and the Netherland’s Masculinity scores relate to the way gender roles are portrayed in advertisements. A total of 887 Dutch advertisements, of at least the size of a quarter of a page and 887 Italian ones were coded to detect whether there exists any patterns of stereotypes. While in both countries women are more often portrayed in a decorative manner and men are seen in professional roles, the level of stereotype usage is significantly higher in Italy, the country with the higher Masculinity index (MAS score Italy:70; The Netherlands: 14).

Tartaglia and Rollero’s study is of particular relevance for this report as it gives evidence to the fact that there is a relationship between the Masculinity score of a country and the way gender is
locally portrayed in advertisements. Sweden and the United States, the countries of interest for this study, differ even more in terms of their Masculinity scores than Italy and the Netherlands. Even though their study dealt with print and not TV commercials and their scope was broader than this report’s as they did not limit their research to a certain age group, their results are regarded as being indicative for the outcome of this report. While Sweden has the most feminine society of all countries measured by Hofstede’s index, the United States can be found in the lower half of the ranking (Hofstede, 2018). Therefore, as culture is often reflected in advertisements, it is expected that the portrayal of gender stereotypes in children’s commercials differ a lot between the two countries.

2.3 The effects of gendered advertising on children

The potential effects of gender-stereotyped advertising on children is a profound one. Television is often the most dominant part of people’s lives and children often are watching television before they can walk, talk or read and therefore it plays a significant role in shaping one’s life (Gerbner et al., 2002). Stereotypes displayed in commercials are driven and bounded by the sex of the individual and the already ‘fixed’ gender role. It has the ability to hinder one’s “development of their natural talents and abilities and it may result in a waste of human resources” (Giomi et al., 2013, p.15). In broader cases, it can impact the development of adolescents “gender identities” as well as significant life choices, which would subsequently affect the rest of their lives (Ibid., p.15). Previous research greatly demonstrates the effect and role of watching television on children’s ability to learn as well as their understanding of gender stereotypes (McGhee & Frueh, 1980).

Children in their role as viewers of commercials and potential consumers of the displayed products are more valuable than adults because of their young age and “psychological immaturity” (Gunter & Oates, 2005, p. 12). Until the age of seven, children cannot identify the existence of persuasive intent in marketing activities (John, 1999). This highlights that the effect of commercials and the influence advertisements have on children and especially young children, are greater than those on adults. Also, young consumers perceive advertisements differently than older ones (Zimmerman, 2017).
The effects caused by exposure to advertisements in children do not only concern purchase choices and consumption behaviour but also their social values (Gunter & Oates, 2005), personal preferences and judgements (Weisgram, Fulcher & Dinella, 2014). According to a study by Grabe, Hyde and Ward (2008), a relationship between media portrayals of supposed to be ideal female bodies and girl’s and later women’s expectation towards ideal bodies exists.

Advertising and media companies often use techniques such as repetition of commercials in order to increase recollection, demand and ‘pester power’ of their products (Handsley, Mehta, Coveney & Nehmy, 2009). The monotonous and standardised recurring messages that are displayed in commercials permeate young people’s minds, forming a common cultural environment and beliefs. As stated in ‘cultivation theory’ the “persistent and persuasive pull” of television is very much culpable for carving social views and perception of the world (Gerbner et al., 2002, p.21).

A study by Mitra and Lewin-Jones (2012) shows the extent to which gender stereotypes are already incorporated in a child’s mind, as children in their first formative years of school are able to identify the gender a product is targeting. Another study demonstrates that when children aged three to six years old were shown TV commercials and asked how they perceived them, 43.3% of the children gave answers that classified the ads as showing either “girl stuff” or “boy stuff” (Zimmerman, 2017).

No studies on the long-term effect of how exposure to stereotyped gender portrayal during childhood shaped people’s perceptions and values towards that topic in adult years have been conducted yet but effects for example on later sexual behaviour have been assumed by Gunter and Oates (2005). Strengthening that assumption is that once women and men have “learned” their place in society through whichever way, they want it to stay like that (Hofstede, 1984b, p.180).

2.4 The portrayal of gender roles in children’s advertisements around the world

Previous studies from the 1970s, 80s and early 90s focussed solely on measuring the presence of gender in television commercials in terms of numbers. It was found that in a majority of
commercials only male children could be seen. However, those numbers changed over a period of 16 years from 84% of all commercials featuring only boys in 1975 to 67% all-male commercials in 1991 (Smith, 1994).

Larson (2001) conducted the first study known to be concerned with the topics of gender portrayal in commercials and children in 1997 and 1998. All commercials that aired on certain networks in the US, in which children could be seen were coded to determine the way they were presented according to their gender. The commercials included both commercials that were targeted at children and commercials that were targeted at adults but still featured child characters. Types of settings, interactions, activities, products advertised, the presence of aggression and proportions of girl and boy characters were determined. The analysis shows that the majority of children in the commercials were presented in a way that matched stereotypes associated with their gender (Larson, 2001).

A little more than a decade later, Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) narrowed the scope of Larson’s study by collecting data from commercials aired on the US children’s TV network Nickelodeon to examine the usage of gender stereotypes in commercials clearly targeted only at children. Focussing on stereotypical attributes like the type of toy, setting, interaction and colour, they found that doll and animal commercials were more likely to feature only girls, while action figure, transportation/construction and sports toys were advertised using mainly male characters. Further findings are that the majority of commercials used only female characters in cooperative play situations and only male characters in competitive interactions. Also, girls were rather shown in an indoor environment and boys in outdoor environments, which matched the researcher’s expectation (Ibid.).

Taking research a step further, Bakir and Palan (2013) conducted a study which compared the gender portrayal (not focussing on stereotypes) in children’s television advertisements in Mexico, Turkey and the United States using a sample of 285 commercials from these three countries. It was reported that agentic dimensions (aggressiveness, independence and leadership) and communal attributes (empathy and nurturance) were present in commercials in all countries but the frequency varied significantly. Explanations for that phenomenon were assumed to be
connected with importance of cultural values like collectivism and individualism. The findings show for example that the “independence” was most present in American commercials and least present in Turkish commercials (Ibid.). That reflects on the countries’ respective levels of individualism/collectivism. That study was the first to date to use one of Hofstede’s dimensions to predict and then prove a relationship between a country’s score and the way children are portrayed. Former research only concerned relationships between commercials in general or targeted at adults and different cultural dimensions.

Hofstede’s individualism/collectivism score helped explain how and why the usage of agentic dimensions and communal attributes in children’s advertisements differed across cultures. This report aims to further contribute to the state of knowledge of how culture predicts the portrayal of the two different sexes and the differences between them in advertisements.
3. Frameworks and Theories

The following frameworks and theories were chosen based on their ability to determine the usage of gender role stereotypes in children’s commercials and the level of gender equality in a country. Combined they help discover the relationship of both topics in the given context.

3.1 Related study conducted in the US

This report is going to use the article “Progression on Nickelodeon? Gender-Role Stereotypes in Toy Commercials” by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) as an empirical benchmark to support the study of the portrayal of gender role stereotypes in commercials aired on Swedish children’s television. The same research design will be used in order to reach the highest possible comparability.

Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) use a sample of 455 toy commercials which aired on the American TV channel Nickelodeon during after-school hours in October 2004 to examine the usage of gender stereotypes. As Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) do in their study in the United States, this report is going to use the “Recognition and Respect” framework by Signorielli and Bacue (1999) as a rationale. It posits that “the positive treatment of females can be viewed through the recognition and respect they receive on the television screen” (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010, p. 834). A content analysis of prime time television programmes from more than three decades (1967 - 1998) shows that even though numbers are changing over the years, women do not get as much recognition and respect as their male counterparts (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). “Recognition” hereby concerns the number of appearances of female characters and “respect” refers to the way they are portrayed (Ibid.). Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) propose nine hypotheses of which five relate to the concept of “recognition” which helps quantify the appearances of the type of toy, the number of single gender portrayal in comparison to mixed-gender portrayal in commercials and the age of the characters. The type of role portrayals and appearances are linked to the concept of “respect” with the respective hypotheses concerning the type of setting and interactions the commercial’s characters can be seen in and the colours that are used.
Within the scope of a qualitative approach a coding schema was developed to measure nine variables (type of toy, gender orientation of toys, number of identifiable boys, number of identifiable girls, gender portrayal, age of character, dominant type of interaction, setting and colour). Using the data that this method produced, seven out of nine hypotheses are supported proving that “gender role stereotypes were ubiquitous throughout commercials” and that “toy commercials are oftentimes marketed specifically to one gender” (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010, p. 843).

Kahlenberg and Hein’s method proves to be a strong foundation for research on the general topic of gender portrayal in children’s commercials as it helps to support the majority of hypotheses and is thus found to be a legitimate choice to use for measuring and serving the purpose of this report.

3.2 Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

There are many definitions used in science to define culture. Hofstede (1984a) defines culture as how people distinguish members of one group or society from another. He presents six dimensions to position the culture of different countries: power distance, individualism, Masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence.

According to Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund (1995), gender stereotype portrayals in advertising can be categorized under the dimension of Masculinity. Both Masculinity and Femininity are related to social and cultural behaviour of women and men. In a highly masculine society, values such as assertiveness, results, competition, and (material) success are mainly important. When a country has a low score on Masculinity, it has a feminine society. In this society both men and women are expected to be modest, gentle, caring, and focused on the quality of life (Hofstede, 1984a). In countries that score a low Masculinity index (and are therefore highly feminine societies) usually both genders are depicted as “breadwinners” while in nations with a high score in Masculinity rather only the men are portrayed as those and women are shown as the “cakewinners” as found by Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund (1995). Hofstede (1984b) also proposes “that the consequences of low Masculinity index scores of a nation would indicate a belief in equality of the sexes”.

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Other theories and indexes concerning nations and their culture and value systems, namely GLOBE (2018) - Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness, the Global Gender Gap Report, the Gender Equality Index and the Gender Inequality Index were also taken into consideration as a measurement tool for gender equality for this study.

The foundation of GLOBE consists of nine cultural dimensions. One of them - Gender Egalitarianism - directly measures the level of gender equality in a country. It is defined as “the degree to which a collective minimizes (and should minimize) gender inequality” (Globe Project, 2018), making it a likely choice of theory for the matter of this study. However, when looking at GLOBE’s way of data collection, limitations arise: 17,000 middle managers were asked to fill in questionnaires. The answers were to be given based on the respondents’ individual thoughts and perceptions. No data could be found on the female/male ratio of the study’s participants, but it can be assumed that more men took part than women as men still make up the majority of workforce worldwide (World Bank, 2017). Thus, it can also be assumed that at least in certain countries management positions in particular are more likely to be held by men than by women. A higher representation of men among the participants does influence and might partly explain some of GLOBE’s results. The perception of gender equality differs a lot between men and women (Inhersight, 2016). Those who do not feel discriminated themselves do not perceive the level of discrimination as high as those who are personally affected. For reliable results of GLOBE’s dimension of Gender Egalitarianism it would thus be needed to have an equal number of male and female respondents which in some countries might not be able to ensure as there are just not enough women in management positions to interview.

Another argument for not using GLOBE’s cultural dimensions in the scope of this research is a recent study by Mathes, Prieler and Adam (2016). Even though being labelled as “the most recent and conceptually clear index of gender egalitarianism” (Saleem 2016, p. 53), no relationship can be found between GLOBE’s scores and the usage of gender role stereotypes in 1755 TV commercials in thirteen countries. Gender role stereotypes were examined by coding television advertisements considering (amongst other categories) the gender of the lead character, the dominant setting and interaction they were portrayed in. While it was hypothesized
by the researchers that the GLOBE score for the different countries would go in line with the way men and women were portrayed in advertisements, the score proves not to be an indicator for the level of gender equality in TV commercials nor does it give an explanation for the frequency of gender role stereotype usage.

The Global Gender Gap Report (2017), which is published annually by the World Economic Forum presents indexes for 144 countries around the world. Those indexes are measuring gender disparities concerning the topics Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. While the researched categories can be seen as meaningful indicators for the state of gender equality in a country from a solely quantitative perspective it lacks any cultural dimension. Only numbers from various sources are analysed to measure the differences between gender in a country. The same goes for the Gender Inequality Index (2016) by the United Nations Development Programme which categorizes in Health, Empowerment and Labor market and the Gender Equality Index (2017) that publishes results concerning Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power and Health. This study aims to examine how gender equality in terms of culture is reflected in the usage of gender stereotypes in advertisements, thus a framework that builds on shared values and beliefs towards a certain topic is needed rather than one based on numbers.

The scores of Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions are based on questionnaires that help to gather knowledge about people’s opinions and perceptions and therefore serve the purpose of this study better than the indexes mentioned above. It can be argued that in the original study all participants were employees of IBM and therefore fail to reflect a whole nation. However, the respondents can be found in different levels of hierarchy and their gender ratio is almost 1:1. Additionally, later studies were conducted in different environments that extended the context of just one company (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Hofstede therefore manages to bypass one of GLOBE’s biggest limitations by including a broader range of participants. Both due to the way of measuring and the choice of respondents, Hofstede’s dimension of Masculinity is chosen as the conceptual framework for this report.
This report aims to produce a reliable comparison between two countries and their respective states of gender equality and the frequency of usage of gender role stereotypes in children’s television commercials. To achieve this it is important to observe which frameworks scholars have previously chosen to do similar comparisons. Hofstede’s six dimensions are almost always used when culture is being compared as for example in the already mentioned study by Bakir and Palan (2013) in which advertisements targeted at children from three different countries are investigated based on the collectivism/individualism dimension. Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund (1995) research the relationship of gender role portrayals in print advertisements in Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States and their relationship with the state of gender equality in these countries also using Hofstede’s framework, namely the Masculinity/Femininity dimension. In order to stay as close to current research as possible to make the outcome of this report comparable to previous and potentially later ones, Hofstede’s six dimensions are chosen as a framework.

The cultural dimension of Masculinity/Femininity is of particular relevance for this thesis because “the sex role distribution common in a particular society is transferred by socialization in families, schools, and peer groups, and through the media” (Hofstede, 1984b, p. 176). Also, advertising can be seen as a mirror of current values and beliefs in a society. Thus, if changes in society are noticeable the advertisement industry will correspond to these changes by adjusting the way their consumers are being targeted accordingly (Nowak, 1984). For the dimension of Masculinity/Femininity that would mean that a low score indicates less frequent usage of gender role stereotypes for that country than for a country with a higher score.
4. Method

This research design was influenced by the research previously done by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) and this study was conducted in a similar manner in order to be able to compare the results between Sweden and the U.S. as best as possible. The study used a mixed method approach, qualitatively coding the commercials and quantitatively for the analysis of the coding results.

This study examined and analysed children’s toy advertisements on Nickelodeon Sweden that were watched via Canal Digital’s online platform. This approach was elected as opposed to conventional television viewing as the authors did not have access to a television that showed Nickelodeon. Furthermore, this medium allowed the authors to pause, as well as rewind and rewatch the commercials allowing for greater precision and accuracy and enabled the authors to discuss what they saw. A spreadsheet was created on Google Sheets in order to enable both authors to easily access the document and both input their findings simultaneously. There were seven different headings, firstly, brand and advertised product, type of toy, gender portrayal, identifiable girls, identifiable boys, dominant type of interaction and finally, setting.

During a two week period, from the 23rd April till the 7th May 2018, the authors logged onto Canal Digital and watched the programmes as well as the commercials. The authors watched the commercials together but conducted coding independently with both authors analysing the same commercials. After the commercial segment finished, the authors compared all coding. This allowed the authors’ to discuss what was just seen and the codes that were chosen. For almost every commercial the authors came to the same conclusion for the coding and any ambiguous results were discussed and the commercials rewatched thereby increasing the confidence of the findings, as well as enabling a consensus to be reached.

The selected time frame was chosen in order to reach a sufficient number of observations and to collect an adequate amount of results to be able to compare with the earlier study. More specifically, children’s advertisements broadcasted after-school hours between 17:00-21:00 were focussed on. Weekend mornings were once the leading window to reach this target group,
however after-school hours have become increasingly essential for advertisers to reach children (Chan-Olmsted, 1996).

The time frame 17:00-21:00 was chosen due to “children’s peak viewing times” in Sweden being 17:00-22:00 (Prell, Palmblad, Lissner & Berg, 2011, p. 608). However this study only analysed toy advertisements until 21:00 as 76% of Nickelodeon Sweden’s viewers were aged 3-14 (MTG, 2016) and therefore according to Garmy et al.’s (2012) study would go to bed before 22:00. Furthermore, Nickelodeon’s last program of the day is aired at 21:45 (Nickelodeon, 2018), thus the analysis of the toy commercials stopped at 21:00. When the authors reached an ample amount of observations to contrast the comparison study and the study had reached saturation point with the same commercials were shown, it was decided to end the study. Furthermore, the authors were unable to continue watching the commercials for another week to see if any new ones were aired due to time pressures.

Furthermore, Nickelodeon Sweden was used for the study. This channel was chosen over other children’s channel as Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) study also used Nickelodeon U.S. which means it was easier to compare the results of the two countries given that the same broadcaster and channel were used. Moreover, Nickelodeon Sweden is the second most watched children’s channel in Sweden for the second longest amount of time, with the first being a non-commercial public channel (MMS, 2017). During the chosen time frame, popular programmes such as “Familjen Thunderman,” “Game Shakers,” “Henry Danger,” “Hunters Hemlighet” and “Victorious” were shown almost everyday during the elected time frame.

Only toy advertisements as well as the visual elements were focussed on in the children’s advertisements were analysed. Only the visual elements were included in the coding scheme in order to keep aligned with the comparison study but also because both authors were not native Swedish speakers. However, the sound was still kept on throughout the process in order to stay open to potential discoveries. Additionally, only toy commercials shown during the stated time frame were included in the study and any identical or repeated advertisements were coded every occasion that they aired. It was important to code each toy commercial every time it was aired due to this being a commonplace marketing strategy. This often helps the viewer to better
understand, as well as recall the advert’s message and helps to make the toy shown in the commercials more familiar (Martin, Thuy-Uyen Le Nguyen & Wi, 2002) which as a result would increase potential purchases of the products (Chang, 2003).

Nickelodeon Sweden was watched and coded for any toy advertisements that appeared according to the predetermined coding criteria by Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010). Firstly, the advertisements were coded on the brand and what kind of toy they were advertising. The toy categories were divided into “dolls,” “action figures and accessories,” “arts and crafts,” “make believe,” “sports equipment,” and “mixed/other”. Then, “the gender orientation of toys”, while the different options included “girls-only”, “boys-only”, “boys-and-girls” and “cannot code”, and the “number of identifiable boys and number of identification of girls” were identified. Similar to the comparison study any adults or people perceived to be older than 18, were not taken into consideration in the coding totals. The next step was to determine the “dominant kind of interaction” which was described as either “dominant”, “cooperative”, “independent” or “parallel”, while according to gender role stereotypes boys are rather shown in a dominant manner and girls in a cooperative kind of play (Ibid.). The last category for coding concerned the “setting” (home/indoors, home/outdoors, other/indoors, other/outdoors, pretend/indoors, pretend/outdoors and cannot code). Hereby indoor settings are rather associated with girls and outdoors settings rather with boys (Ibid.). A theme that was used in the study conducted in the US was the age of the characters. Toy’s commercials on Swedish television will not be coded according to that category, as the age of the characters is not relevant for the matter of this report. Also, colours are not coded because they do not concern the hypotheses that were tested but only help Kahlenberg and Hein answer a research question that does not relate to this report. The aforementioned coding categories were then selected and noted in a Google Sheets document when they appeared in the commercials.

The following nine hypotheses were tested by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) in order to determine the frequency of usage of gender role stereotypes in advertisements aimed at children in the United States:
H1: More girls only will be featured in doll and animal commercials than boys only or boys and girls.

H2: More boys only will be featured in action figure, game, building, sports and transportation/construction commercials than girls-only or boys and girls.

H3: More boys only than girls only will be identifiable in commercials airing on Nickelodeon.

H4: There will be more girls only and boys only commercials than boys and girls commercials.

H5: Commercials on Nickelodeon will feature more children than any other age group, including preschoolers, preteens, adolescents, or adults with children, preteens or adolescents.

H6: More girls only will be portrayed as cooperative than boys only or boys and girls.

H7: More boys only will be portrayed as more competitive than girls only or boys and girls.

H8: More girls only will be represented indoors (home and other) than boys only or boys and girls.

H9: More boys only will be represented outdoors (home and other) than girls only or boys and girls.

The hypotheses were tested by calculating percentages and if there was a majority for what the hypotheses predicted, it was deemed to be supported. All hypotheses excluding H5 were tested in the same manner for Sweden. This was done to be able to ensure a legitimate comparison of the two countries. H5 was excluded because it does not concern the topic of gender role stereotype portrayals.

Aside from the data collection mentioned above, literature was also read to gain knowledge about the subject area as well as to create the literature review and give an overview of the subject along with the theoretical framework and method chapters. Both physical books, online data sources and websites were used to collect the information. Wide ranges of keywords were used to generate broad search results for data about the chosen topic area (Zou & Stan, 1998). Keywords used were: gender stereotypes, gender roles, children’s advertisements, gender equality, children’s gender stereotypes, toy commercials and tv commercials. In order to safeguard the quality of the research, only academic journal articles were used throughout the process from either Google Scholar, Mälardalen Högskola’s library database which enabled access to ABI/ INFORM, Emerald Insight, Taylor and Francis Online, EBSCOhost, Cambridge
University Press, SAGE publications, SpringerLink, PsycINFO, DOAJ, Elsevier and JSTOR. These articles from well-respected scientific journals had already been subjected to peer reviews and scrutiny thereby increasing the credibility of the information. Using highly respected and validated resources ensures high quality research as well as enabling the authors to find valuable and credible sources. Secondary data, such as any statistics that were used, were collected from well-established and recognised web sources. MMS (Mediamatning I Skandinavien), a company that conducts research on the Swedish media industry, Statens Medieråd, the media council in Sweden, CIA, the American Intelligence Agency, which enabled the authors to find out about the Swedish population and the European Commission were all used in the study. Furthermore, the Nickelodeon website was used to access data about the company, as well as the programmes. Hofstede Insights (an institute founded on Geert Hofstede’s work) enabled the authors to generate information on the culture of Sweden and the United States.

Similarly, it is important to consider the validity of the study. Validity refers to how well a report symbolises the social phenomena it portrays (Silverman, 2013). The validity of a study can be created both internally and externally, by the extent in which the findings are able to be understood and generalised (Gaus, 2017). All of the coding variables were adapted from an earlier study by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) that focused on a similar topic as well as method and therefore the validity of the coding variables were tested and verified. Similarly, the method chosen was considered a trustworthy way to conduct the study as it has previously been accepted. In addition, triangulation of data was created by collecting data from more than one source, for example secondary data from online sources and watching the television commercials to collect primary data (Denzin, 1970).

The authors intention was not only to reproduce Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) coding scheme for Sweden but also to be open to any new or emerging themes throughout the commercials which the U.S. study did not notice or include. The authors were open to any new observations that were different in the commercials as well as on the Nickelodeon channel itself. The purpose of this was to add value to the study, compare the two different cultural contexts without closing the authors perspective beforehand.
Finally, the data collected was used to test the same hypotheses as the U.S. study while expecting different results from Sweden. The percentages were used to measure the frequency of the stereotypes in the hypotheses.

5. Findings on Sweden and the US

5.1 History of gender equality in Sweden

When the topic of gender differences comes up, Scandinavian countries are usually the ones considered to be paragons of fairness and equality. That common belief proves to be true. In 2015 the European Institute for Gender Equality ranked Sweden as most gender equal among all European countries (score 82.6/100). A study published by the World Economic Forum measuring the gap between gender (building on sub-indexes benchmarking countries on their progress concerning economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment) exhibits that Sweden scores high even on a bigger scale. The Global Gender Gap Report states that Sweden has the fifth smallest gap between men and women compared to 143 other countries (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Those results could be achieved thanks to more than 150 years of continuous effort put into fighting discrimination in Sweden. The first milestone of many was the introduction of equal inheritance rights for women and men in 1845. Followed by the right to vote and run for office for women in 1921, the 60’s and 70’s proved to be meaningful decades for gender equality. A law against rape in marriage passed, joint taxation of spouses became possible, new abortion laws came into force and Sweden became the first country to replace maternity leave with parental leave, the latter being updated and expanded in 2002 and 2016 (Swedish Institute, 2018). Women’s security was strengthened in 1998 with the introduction of the Act on Violence against Women and the Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services coming into effect only a year later. Further laws passed in 2005 and 2011 are supposed to guarantee every individual its right of being sexually self-determined and legal protection of stalking (Ibid.).
Another milestone to ensure equality standards are kept, was the introduction of the Equality Ombudsman in 2009 when four already existing anti-discrimination government agencies were merged together. The Equality ombudsman’s task is to work on behalf of the Swedish government and parliament by supervising the laws relating to discrimination. Those laws concern gender topics as well as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age (The Government Offices, 2018).

According to the Swedish Institute (2018), in educational matters the focus on equality is big. The Education Act incorporates guidelines that ensure gender equality on all levels of the educational system in Sweden. The adaption of traditional gender patterns and roles by Swedish students is supposed to be fought by teaching personnel using methods that counteract those stereotypes.

While there are still differences to be found in women’s and men’s salaries (the average monthly income of a woman in Sweden is around 88% of men) and in the share of men and women in CEO, chairman, board member and management positions in the private sector (6:94, 7:93, 29:71 and 37:63; respective shares in per cent), the positions in the public sector are spread almost equally (Statistics Sweden, 2016). In 2016, there were 12 female government ministers out of 23 in total and 43.6% of seats occupied by women. Sweden has one of the highest rates of women in parliament (Ibid.).

5.2 Television usage among children

Children under the age of 14 make up 17.6% of the Swedish population (CIA, 2017). According to a report by MMS (2017) 48% of children in the age group 3-14 are watching television daily. Of this percentage, 22.2% of children watch the public channel SVT Barnkanalen which does not have any commercials and 21.7% of children are watching television from satellite channels, such as Cartoon Network, The Disney Channel and Nickelodeon (Ibid., 2017). Additionally, 3-14 year olds are watching television for an average of 60 minutes per day (Ibid.). After SVT Barnkanalen, Nickelodeon Sweden is the channel viewed for the longest amount of time for the age group 3-14 (MMS, 2017). After school hours were chosen specifically to conduct the
research as 61% of children aged 2-8 watch television after school, and it was the second most popular activity after spending time with family (Statens Medieråd, 2017).

5.3 Ban on targeting children

In 1996 Sweden’s Radio and Television Act introduced a ban of advertising targeted towards children under the age of 12 (Plogell & Sundström, 2004). This ban included “commercial advertising in television broadcast, teletext and on-demand TV” (Ibid., p.15) and as such all content should not be produced for the purpose of drawing a child’s attention. This regulation for broadcast media derived from a study highlighting the fact that children could not “clearly distinguish advertising messages from programme content” (Caraher, Landon & Dalmeny, 2005, p.600).

Despite these restrictions on commercials, children are regardless exposed to a high level of advertisement from satellite channels broadcast from outside of Sweden. However, Sweden had previously tried to enforce the ban on television broadcasted from other countries, but the European Court of Justice ruled that this was against the “EU Television without Frontiers Directive” (Plogell and Sundström, 2004).

5.4 Culture according to Hofstede in the US
With a score of 62 for the Masculinity/Femininity dimension of Hofstede as showcased in Figure 1, the United States is found in the lower half of the index. The United States is therefore a rather masculine society. That means that in this country women and men partly have the same rights and opportunities but that there is still a noticeable gap between the two genders which is expressed in for example acceptance and support for traditional gender roles. A high score in this dimension is also an indicator for inequality that does not only concern shared values and beliefs in the society but also other factors such as health, income and education.

5.5 Findings from Nickelodeon US

Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) test nine hypotheses of which seven are supported by the data they collected while watching children’s toy commercials on Nickelodeon US. This report will only focus on eight of the original nine hypotheses. Of these eight, seven are supported. However, some hypotheses receive greater support than others.

$H_1$ (more girls only will be featured in doll and animal commercials than boys only or boys and girls) predicts that commercials for dolls and animals would rather feature only girls instead of only boys or mixed gender finds overwhelming support with 58.3% of all doll and 82.6% of all animal advertisements showed only girls. $H_2$ (more boys only will be featured in action figure, game, building, sports and transportation/construction commercials than girls-only or boys and girls) is supported but not so extensively. While most commercials for transportation/construction, action figure and sport’s toys feature predominantly boys (87.1%, 72.0% and 63.0%), a slight majority of games/building toys showed children of both genders (32.9% boys and girls with the next smaller share being only-boys with 31.5%). $H_3$ (more boys only than girls only will be identifiable in commercials airing on Nickelodeon) predicts that the number of boys shown in toy commercials is higher than the number of girls. The authors identify 559 girls compared to only 475 boys in the 455 commercials they watched. Thus, this hypothesis is rejected. $H_4$ (there will be more girls only and boys only commercials than boys and girls commercials) also deals with the number of children portrayed and finds support because boys and girls are only featured in 18.8% of all commercials, thus the majority of
commercials shows either exclusively female children or exclusively male children. Both hypotheses that concern the type of interaction the characters are portrayed in are supported by Kahlenberg and Hein’s findings: The majority of commercials that showed cooperative play feature only girls (51.9%) and even higher support is found for the prediction that only boys (58.3%) would rather be playing competitively than children of both genders or only female children. The study from the US predicted that only girls were featured in any kind of indoor setting than boys only or mixed gender. The data collected on Nickelodeon U.S. strongly supports that hypothesis with 84.3% of commercials showing only female characters in indoor settings while \( H_0 \) \(( \text{more boys only will be represented outdoors (home and other) than girls only or boys and girls})\) almost received the same support with 77.8% of all advertisements that were set outdoors at home featured solely male children instead of boys and girls or only girls and also in other outdoor settings boys only commercials had the biggest share.

### 5.6 Culture according to Hofstede in Sweden

![Figure 2. Hofstede's cultural dimensions of Sweden. Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, (2010). Available at: https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/sweden/](image)

Figure 2 showcases Hofstede’s cultural dimensions of Sweden. Sweden’s Masculinity score of 5 speaks for a very feminine society in which both women and men are regarded and treated in (almost) the same way. Swedish society is therefore considered to be highly gender equal with only a small gap between the two sexes and values and beliefs among the Swedish people being rather unaccepting of traditional gender roles.
5.7 Findings concerning Kahlenberg and Hein’s hypotheses in Swedish toys commercials

Over the duration of two weeks a total of 383 commercials were watched, coded and used to test Kahlenberg and Hein’s hypotheses in Sweden. Advertisements for sport, game, arts and crafts, animal, doll and mixed/other toys were found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of toy</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Equipment</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolls</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/other</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Crafts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>383</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Type of toy and frequency shown on Nickelodeon Sweden*

The first hypothesis (\(H_1\): *more girls only will be featured in doll and animal commercials than boys only or boys and girls*) stating that there will be more girls only featured in doll and animal commercials than boys only and boys and girls partly finds support in Sweden: 100% of all 55 doll commercials feature only girls while there is just one animal commercial (which aired 22 times) and that features both boys and girls.

Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) propose (\(H_2\): *More boys only will be featured in action figure, game, building, sports and transportation/construction commercials than girls-only or boys and girls*) that there will be more boys only featured in action figure, game, building, sports and transportation/construction commercials than girls only or boys and girls. This hypothesis could only be tested in parts as there were no action figure, building and transportation/construction commercials aired on Nickelodeon Sweden during the time of the research. However, all 137 sport equipment advertisements showed children of both genders and exactly half of the 150 game commercials (game commercials have the biggest share of all toy commercials) showed boys and girls. The other half of the game commercials showed boys only.
The third tested hypothesis from the original study ($H_3$: More boys only than girls only will be identifiable in commercials airing on Nickelodeon) does not find support from the findings in Sweden: It is proposed that there would be more boys only than girls only identifiable on commercials airing on Nickelodeon and actually the opposite is the case: While there are 35 commercials that show only male children, almost double the amount, 68 commercials, show only girls. However, when counting the overall number of girls and boys in all kinds of commercials there are more boys (535) than girls (493).

Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) expectation considering the number of single gender and mixed gender commercials finds even less support in Sweden. For their study in America they hypothesize that there would be more girls only and boys only advertisements than boys and girls ($H_4$: There will be more girls only and boys only commercials than boys and girls commercials). Only 103 commercials showed just one gender, while the remaining 281 toy advertisements on Nickelodeon Sweden featured both female and male children.

The sixth hypothesis ($H_6$: More girls only will be portrayed as cooperative than boys only or boys and girls) predicts that more girls only will be shown playing cooperatively than boys only or boys and girls. This hypothesis is partly rejected and partly supported for Sweden as of all the 33 commercials that show children play cooperatively two thirds feature children of both genders and only one third shows only female children interacting. No boys only are playing in a cooperative manner so that part of the hypothesis finds support.

The airing of 159 toy commercials on Nickelodeon Sweden show “competitive” as the dominant kind of interaction between the children, making it the most showed kind of interaction out of the four options (cooperative, competitive, parallel and independent). Of these advertisements, 124 (77.99%) show boys and girls and 35 (22.01%) show only boys. Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) seventh hypothesis ($H_7$: More boys only will be portrayed as more competitive than girls only or boys and girls) proposing that there would be more boys only shown in competitive playing situations than children of mixed gender is therefore rejected. However, it has to be mentioned that there are no girls only featured playing competitively.
For the dominant setting in which the commercial’s action takes place the original study ($H_8$: More girls only will be represented indoors (home and other) than boys only or boys and girls) hypothesised that there would be more girls only shown indoors than boys only or boys and girls. The findings from Nickelodeon Sweden prove that there are more girls only (13) shown in indoor settings than boys only (1). However, the majority of all 257 commercials that feature an indoor setting shows girls as well as boys.

The ninth hypothesis ($H_9$: More boys only will be represented outdoors (home and other) than girls only or boys and girls) finds also very little support in Swedish toy commercials. The prediction is that there would be more boys only commercials that take place in an outdoor setting than girls only or boys and girls. The findings show that out of 112 commercials that show an outdoor setting, 30.36% feature boys only, making this a bigger share than those commercials that show children of both genders (20.53%). However, the largest share with 49.11% are girls only advertisements. Thus, only the first part of the hypothesis is supported. It also has to be noted that no “other/outdoors” setting could be found but only “pretend/outdoors” and “home/outdoors”. Also, a majority of the commercials (70.5%) show an indoor setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant kind of interaction</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Gender of the children</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>383</td>
<td></td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Dominant kind of interaction and gender on Nickelodeon Sweden
5.8 Additional findings in Swedish toy commercials

Viewing television commercials gave light to many additional findings that were not included in the codes. A particularly interesting finding is that Nickelodeon Sweden makes it very clear when the advertisements are starting and when they are ending, with both a visual text and a voiceover. Similarly, the Nickelodeon branding and logo was still in a seasonal winter theme, with snow and skis covering the Nickelodeon letters.

The number of commercials varies greatly throughout the viewing times. It ranges from two to six commercials and sometimes the programmes just runs from one to another without any commercial breaks. Before the commercials start, there are often short clips and previews of new episodes and upcoming programmes in the following week and advertisements of other programmes on the channel. Occasionally, Nickelodeon Sweden advertises its own ‘Together For Good’ movement where it promotes children’s rights and shows case studies of people they have helped all over the world from the ‘Together For Good’ program. Similarly, a large number of the commercials were simply repeated throughout the stated time frame. Although sound and any audio was not part of the coding the results show that even if commercials portray children of both genders, the voice over is usually by only one.

One particularly fascinating discovery was that there were no food commercials shown. However, frequent clips from Nickelodeon Sweden show unhealthy food such as donuts and ice

### Table 3. Setting and gender on Nickelodeon Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Gender of the children</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indoons</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>Boys-only</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls-only</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys-and-girls</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>383</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cream when the advertisements start and finish. Apart from one other type of commercial for an indoor soft play area ‘Leo’s Lekland’, which was not included in the coding as it was not considered a toy, only toy commercials were aired. Finally, there are some aspects of the commercials that were not included in the codes, such as anyone over the age of 18 and many of the commercials featured one adult in it, either watching over the children or talking to the audience about the product features.
6. Analysis

To compare the usage of gender role stereotypes in children’s toy commercials the same method of data collection was used for the United States and Sweden and the same hypotheses were tested. Relating to the two countries’ levels of gender equality, based on Hofstede’s dimension of Masculinity/Femininity, quite different results could be expected.

Sweden, the country with the highest worldwide score on the Masculinity/Femininity scale, proves to stay true to those expectations. While in the United States most hypotheses are supported stating that either girls only or boys only commercials have the highest shares in a category. In Sweden it is usually the mixed gender advertisements that have the highest percentages which goes in line with the country’s long history of gender equality movement. All commercials that advertise sports toys feature boys and girls, 94.83% of those that are set in an indoor environment show male and female children and a competitive kind of interaction features in 77.9% of all cases boys and girls. The impression that both genders are equally represented in commercials is strengthened by the number of advertisements that feature children of both sexes compared to single gender advertisements. Almost three quarters (73.1%) of all commercials airing on Nickelodeon Sweden show boys and girls and while only 26.9% show either boys only or girls only. In the United States it is the other way around with the majority of all advertisements showing only one gender. Also, in America all hypotheses concerning the categories mentioned above are supported proving that stereotypes are very often used to advertise toys to children which relates to America’s high score (62) on Hofstede’s dimension of Masculinity/Femininity.

While the most striking differences between the United States and Sweden can be recognized in $H_2$, $H_4$, $H_6$ and $H_7$, an almost equal result is found for both countries in $H_3$. Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) predict that a higher number of boys than girls would be featured in toy’s advertisements. Even though the hypothesis is supported only for Sweden and not for the United States which can be regarded as an unlikely outcome, the percentages of both genders in Sweden are slightly more similar than in America. In the United States 54.06% of all children are female and 45.94% are male; in Sweden 47.96% are female and 52.04% are male. In regards to a possible
relationship between the state of gender equality and the portrayal of children in toy advertisements those numbers match with Sweden’s feminine society but are somehow surprising for a culture as masculine as America’s.

Contradicting expectations made based on the level of gender equality are the results for H1 and H8. It is hypothesised by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) that doll commercials would most likely feature only girls. That prediction is supported in their findings and also for Sweden the hypothesis is true. Surprisingly the support for Sweden is much greater than in the United States with all doll commercials showing solely girls. This might however be due to the fact that there is only one doll product advertised on Nickelodeon Sweden and therefore no general statement can be made. The original study lacks information about the number of different commercials in each category. Thus, no reliable comparison can be made for that category of coding.

The last hypothesis supports the American study with 77.8% of all commercials that are set in an outdoor environment featuring boys only. In Sweden that hypothesis is not only unsupported but the opposite can be seen. Almost half of all the advertisements that show an outdoor setting feature girls only. This result does prove that no stereotypes are used for that category in Sweden because that would mean that more boys only would be featured like in the United States but the usage of only female characters makes it just as gender unequal.

When comparing the findings from American and Swedish toy commercials airing on the two countries’ Nickelodeon channels, it can be seen that in fact there is a relationship between the level of gender equality in a country and the usage of gender role stereotypes. While in America the majority of hypotheses are supported proving that the way of advertising a type of children’s toys, the type of interaction of the characters and the settings the children are featured in relate to common stereotypes. In Sweden the majority of commercials show children of mixed gender in all different coding categories.
7. Discussion

The aim of the analysis of children’s toy commercials on the Swedish television channel Nickelodeon was to understand whether cultural differences between America and Sweden are reflected in their advertisements. Nickelodeon was chosen in order to be able to adequately compare the two studies as well as it being the most viewed commercial channel for children in Sweden. The fundamental ambition of the study is to find out if toy companies adapt or modify their commercials regarding different stereotypes in the two countries. The expectations of this study were that Sweden would have a much more equal display of boys and girls and also that stereotypical boy’s and girl’s toys would show a mix of genders not just one. Overall, the results show that the commercials do slightly contrast between the U.S. and Sweden very much depending on the culture and gender equality differences.

An interesting discovery from the analysis is that the majority of commercials in Sweden feature mixed gender of boys and girls. Nowak (1984) finds that the advertising industry would in fact adapt promotional activities to coincide with the culture of the target country. For Sweden, this can be seen with how marketers did not target typically boy orientated products such as game and sports equipment to one particular gender, but they targeted them to both genders and included boys and girls in the advertisements. This very much reflects the Swedish culture and the feminine society, which displays an equal representation of the sexes. This result is aligned with Hofstede’s (1984b) study where he demonstrates that countries with high feminine society scores signify better gender equality. Moreover, the results agree with the “recognition and respect” framework (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) which demonstrates that a country that hold women and females in general to a high regard will thus be reflected in how frequently they are seen on television. On the other hand, in the U.S. the commercials mainly feature one gender or the other which can be explained by the rather high Masculinity score which would suggest that more stereotypical roles are portrayed as in Tartaglia and Rollero’s (2015) study.

Subsequently, the frequently seen mixed gender in the commercials was also seen in the number of competitive commercials. Unlike in the U.S. study which shows more boys in competitive interactions and very much fits in line with stereotypical roles. The Swedish study shows boys
and girls were both more likely to be seen in a competitive interaction and without a doubt was the most dominant type of interaction. However, the results demonstrating the portrayal of girls more often in cooperative interactions than boys, very much fits in line with the stereotypical views of males and females and contradicts what the authors’ expected for the study. The results also display the same outcome as the U.S. study. However, the number of commercials in Sweden showing girls in cooperative interactions was relatively low, with only 11 commercials out of 383 showing such a portrayal. In terms of dominant interactions, Sweden portrays highly competitive commercials, whereas America shows more cooperative interactions between the children in the commercials. These results somewhat show contradictory outcomes as to what would be expected for masculine and feminine societies.

Furthermore, the study finds that Swedish adverts display more game and sports equipment. This could be due to the fact that Swedes are known for living a more active lifestyle than in America. This reflects the Swedish way of life and culture and that Scandinavians are known for their healthy lifestyle. According to a study by the European Commission (2014), Swedes were ranked first for participating in the most amount of sports and highest activity levels in Europe, with 70% of Swedes exercising at least once a week and Sweden was ranked as one of the healthiest countries in the World (Lim, Bhutta, Forouzanfar, Gething, Hay, Kinfu et al., 2016). On the contrary, the U.S. ranked 28th in the study and shows significantly less sports commercials. Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) study shows the U.S. with a dominant and highest airing of doll commercials. Thus, both these points emphasise and support Nowak (1984) that the advertising industry adapts and shows different products matching the culture and popularity of that target country.

Although not part of the original study, an interesting finding, and one that strengthens the idea that commercials reflect the culture and society, was that in the U.S. the highest number of commercials seen were unhealthy food commercials. In contrast, Sweden did not show any food commercials and the majority were toy commercials. This can be further explained by the tight restrictions Sweden has on advertising and the healthier lifestyle in comparison to the U.S.
Furthermore, many of the commercials were set indoors in both America and Sweden. However, this aspect could be due to the Swedish climate. This study was conducted during the spring and the transitional period from winter. This also was seen in the Nickelodeon branding bumper advertisements displaying the brand logo which was very much geared towards a winter theme, such as snow over the logo as well as displaying seasonal activities, for example skiing. This could in fact explain why the authors’ results display a high number of indoor products for children as the long, cold days are largely spent inside and the advertisements shown on the channel were very much adapted towards the colder seasons.

Nonetheless, many of the commercials were repeated frequently which is very much agreeable with the American study which also finds a high degree of repetition. Explanations for such marketing techniques can be related to the fact that frequent exposure to commercials creates favourable perceptions of the product and brand (Messmer, 1979) and very much support the ‘cultivation theory’ (Gerbner et al., 2002). Not only would this increase the ability to recall an advert (Martin et al., 2002) but also increases children’s demand for a product and the subsequent ‘pester power’ (Valkenburg, 2000; Handsley, Mehta, Coveney & Nehmy, 2009). In turn, repetition techniques have the potential to translate into increased sales for the toy companies and manufacturers.

7.1. Limitations

When discussing the overall results and viability of the study, it is important to mention a few limitations that arose during the process. Firstly, the results show a comparison of two countries only, and in order to give a better representation it could be suggested that further research with comparing more countries would be advisable. Moreover, the research and results only demonstrate the visual aspects of the commercials. However, in order to gain a wider perspective and understanding of how cultural differences and gender role portrayals in children’s commercials are shown, it could be interesting to code any audio and sounds in the advertisements to understand the commercials in all respects.

Moreover, the comparison study by Kahlenberg and Hein (2010) is now eight years old. The present-day gender equality has changed during these years meaning that the advertisements on
Nickelodeon in the United States could have greatly changed and altered to mirror the advancements in gender equality. Similarly, the view towards stereotyping and the awareness of the effect of stereotyping in the media and advertising industry has changed due to the continual prominence and prevalence of gender equality all over the world.

Additionally, many of the commercials watched were replicated and repeated and were coded everytime they appeared not taking into consideration for any duplications. This marketing strategy is customary in the advertising industry and was conducted in unison with Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) study. A simple antidote for future studies could be to state any duplications and the frequency that they appear, in addition to stating any advertisements that appear only once.

Finally, the quantity of commercials coded is comparatively less than Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) study. This study analyses 383 commercials from Sweden and the respective study analyses 455. Similarly, this study conducted one hour less of research thus perhaps explaining why there were fewer commercials. The studies were also conducted during different seasons and time period and dates. It could have been better to conduct the research during the holiday season as marketers allocate over half of their budgets to advertising during this period (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010). It would be desirable when analysing the contrasts between the two countries to allocate the same time periods, however this was not possible with the thesis time constraints and schedule.
8. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine a possible relationship between a country’s level of gender equality and the way children’s toy commercials are designed especially paying attention to the usage of gender role stereotypes. Sweden and the United States differ a lot concerning their Masculinity/Femininity score and thus it was expected that also the commercials on both countries’ Nickelodeon channel would differ. Not for all hypotheses but for the majority of them different results are found proving that in fact the way advertisements are designed mirrors cultural values to a certain extent.

The aim was not to show that stereotypes are opposing like only children of one gender being featured in commercials that advertise toys which according to the recognition and respect framework would rather be considered typical for the other. The level of gender equality is rather reflected in a similar portrayal of both genders regarding the number of appearances and the way boys and girls are presented.

According to the findings from Nickelodeon Sweden, Kahlenberg and Hein’s (2010) study from the United States and Hofstede’s results for Sweden’s and America’s Masculinity/Femininity scores, it can be stated that a relationship between a country’s level of gender equality and the way children are portrayed in toy commercials exists as the design of advertisements is adapted to local differences. This is mainly done by including children of both genders in the majority of all advertisements.

As culture has such a big influence on the way the advertisement industry targets consumers the question can be raised whether the gender equality movement in Sweden also plays a role in a broader context. Are there also changes to be seen in commercials that aim to sell products to adults, persons who are beyond their formative years that are therefore not that easily influenced? And does the design of the products themselves, whether those are toys or products for older consumers, also adapt to fit certain shared values considering gender issues?
A new generation is being raised in Sweden that is taught not to think or act in stereotypical ways and to treat every human being equally in every situation no matter what gender that person has. Even though there is still a long way to go, those slow steps toward a state of total equality will according to this study’s findings be reflected by how advertisers conceptualize commercials and maybe even by how companies design their products. Children are easily influencable and once they are conditioned to act or think a certain way that process is hard to reverse. The marketing industry can therefore, at least up to a certain degree, be held responsible for values and beliefs incorporated in today’s children’s minds. Depending on decisions made by companies and advertisers desired changes in society are either helped or harmed. Those processes will therefore be interesting to watch both from a sociological as well as marketing point of view.
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