

AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF SELECTED EARLY TELEVISION COMMERCIALS
COMPARED WITH SELECTED RECENT TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

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In 1959, after 10 years of network television advertising, an awards program was established to honor the "best" television commercials of the decade. This program was received with such enthusiasm that a yearly awards presentation was begun in 1960 that has since become known as the Clio Awards. This paper focuses on characteristics of these 69 original award-winning commercials from 1948-1958 and contrasts them with 58 spots of recent Clio Award years 1976 and 1977.

This analysis can only be considered exploratory because these early and recent commercials do not necessarily represent all the commercials of their respective periods. These commercials were compared across a broad range of characteristics: Type of storyline; selling strategies; use of humor; live action versus animation; depiction of Blacks, women, Orientals, and "rugged" men; and major production techniques. Every commercial was viewed in an effort to segment and study its various individual characteristics.

In analyzing the six types of storylines: Problem-solution, celebrity endorsement, straight-sell, dramatic, song-and-dance production and demonstration, the formats have remained relatively consistent over the years. One noticeable increase is the dramatic structure. The rise of public relations/image commercials may account for some of the increase. From 1971 to 1978, television showed a 48 percent expenditure increase in this commercial strategy. The public relations commercial also lends itself to the dramatic format, because corporate stories are being related to the public.

An integral part of this analysis of early television Clios was to look at how Blacks, women and Orientals were depicted compared with recent commercials. It is easy to sum up the Black actor in the early Clios: There are none. The only exception is from a 1955, 2-minute Dodge automobile extravaganza. In the Detroit Dodge plant, one Black, named Joe, is shown at his station, face partly obscured for about 1.5 seconds. This is the only occasion that a Black appears in any of the 69 commercials from 1948-1958. Black actors appear in four of the 58 commercials from 1976-77. In two of the four, Blacks dominate the action, but in both cases they are Black children and not adults.

Women dominate the action in eight commercials from the early era. Yet, in all but one case, the women are in the home and are seen using household products, like Kleenex, Clairol and Tide. They are usually depicted in some stressful house-cleaning situation. In the recent Clios, women were out of the home more than not and were now selling a variety of