

## **ADVERTISING AND ART EDUCATION**

The motivation behind this dissertation is to identify the benefits the average student might gain from an art and design education. My starting point is the belief that art and design changes the way you look at things. This is not meant in a pretentious way, but rather in something as simple as noticing the opening sequence of a television programme, and deciding whether it is good or bad.

The hypothesis to be tested is that art and design students can 'read' advertisements better than those without an art education. During the course of the argument I outline the areas within the Junior Certificate art syllabus that are relevant to visual literacy. I choose advertising as a focus because of its wide exposure, its manipulative nature and the potential vulnerability of the teenage consumer.





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Graphic Design Education interweaves the practice of design basics with classroom application. This dissertation is designed to lead teachers of art through the various design principles and elements to the methods of creating graphic design work.

The benefits of design education and in particular graphic design have yet to be given due recognition in the Irish educational system. This dissertation examines this system through the state examinations in art and also looks at the attitude of teachers towards this art form. The word design connotes planning. The information required in planning schemes of work is examined from the process of design to exercises and assignments to be given to students of art.





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**ADVERTISING AND ART EDUCATION -  
AN ANALYSIS OF VISUAL LITERACY AMONG STUDENT  
CONSUMERS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	v

### CHAPTER I

#### ADVERTISING : A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

(i) A History of Advertising.....	1
(ii) The Effects of Advertising.....	8

### CHAPTER II

ART EDUCATION AND THE MASS MEDIA.....	20
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### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

(i) Visual Literacy.....	25
(ii) The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus.....	27
(iii) The Case Study.....	30

CONCLUSION.....	40
APPENDICES	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42





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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A** Magazine Advertisements

APPENDIX A1 Virgin Lips

APPENDIX A2 Caterpillar Boots

### **APPENDIX B** Questionnaires

APPENDIX B1 Pepsi Max

APPENDIX B2 Levi 501s

APPENDIX B3 Virgin Lips

APPENDIX B4 Caterpillar Boots







## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore ideas revolving around the relevance art and design education has on the lives of its students. Advancements in computer technology have led to an increase in the variety of visual imagery in the mass media. Advertising encompasses a large area of visual communication and has a wide exposure, appearing on television, billboards, packages and in magazines. It was chosen as a focus for this dissertation due to its manipulative nature and the vulnerability of the teenage consumer.

The first chapter intends to furnish the reader with a knowledge of the roots of advertising. Although it has always been with us in some form or another, it is only with the advent of television that advertising has truly become a powerful influence on society. The second part of Chapter I deals with its consequences and effects.

x

Chapter II, Art Education and the Mass Media, reinforces the necessity for visual education to combat this bombardment of persuasive imagery. The Methodology Chapter outlines the areas within the Junior Certificate art syllabus that are relevant to visual literacy. The hypothesis to be tested is that art and design students can 'read' advertisements better than those without an art education. A series of four questionnaires on students responses to advertising are analysed and conclusions are drawn.





# **CHAPTER I**

## **ADVERTISING:**

### **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first part examines advertising from an historical point of view, tracing its development in language and illustration from the seventeenth century to present day. The second part deals with the exposure and subsequent effects of advertising on society. The intention is to gain a deeper understanding of advertisements and the vital role they play in shaping modern culture. To advertise, according to the Oxford English dictionary is to:

make (thing, oneself) generally or publicly known; to describe goods publicly with a view to increasing sales.<sup>1</sup>

Advertising was once defined as simply the art of moving an idea from one man's head into the head of another.<sup>2</sup>

#### **I (i) A History of Advertising**

According to Dyer (1982), advertising began as a simple system of proclamation and announcement. It is consistent with most types of human society - not alien to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The public street crier of medieval times advertised the wares of local traders. However, advertising as we know it didn't emerge until the seventeenth century, coinciding with the first circulation of newspapers.

By the middle of the century newspapers were regularly available in large towns around Britain. Notices were carried for popular markets and fairs as were small announcements from booksellers and merchants. Advertisements for the earliest







patent medicines and “miraculous” cures, which were then very significant, would today be termed as classified or small advertisements.

The range and type of advertisement began to change in the middle of the seventeenth century. The content became less restrained and more direct. Language was used enthusiastically. Glowing phrases such as “excellent and approved” hint at the language used in some advertisements today. Wide sweeping statements were made about products e.g. “The Only True Plaguewater” and “Infallible Preventative Pills”. Already it is possible to trace a process of development from conventional recommendations to examples of persuasion and propaganda.

In the eighteenth century literacy improved, allowing more people access to newspapers. In 1702 Britain's first daily newspaper, *The Daily Courant*, appeared. Women readers were catered for in social journals such as *The Tatler* and *Spectator*. The volume of advertisements appearing in newspapers reflected the increase in readership. This was despite the introduction of an advertising tax in 1712 demanding a one shilling charge on each advertisement, regardless of size. Newspaper advertisements at this time were directed at wealthy clients of coffee houses where papers would circulate. Household goods were rarely included, advertisements for wigs, books and theatre tickets being more typical of the time. At this time advertisements were rarely illustrated, although simple illustrative devices were occasionally used.

In advertising history the eighteenth century is remembered as the age of “quacks”. Pills, purges and solvents were peddled and extravagant claims made. Tobacco was declared as being good for the “Head, Eyes, Stomach, Lungs, Rheumatism and Gout”.<sup>3</sup> The impact of the quacks on advertising has been substantial. Subsequent generations of advertisers have perfected their art of puffery and persuasion. Dr. Johnson, a critic and humorist at the time was sceptical of the growth in advertising, warning against “the magnificence of promises”. He appealed for higher standards, and more truth in advertisements though in comparison with





today's standards most advertisements were straightforward and informative. The language and style tended to be formal and respectful, as well as ceremonious.

With the nineteenth century came an increase in manufacturing and an expansion in trade. The Advertising Tax was abolished in 1853, increasing newspaper circulation and promoting a growth in the volume of advertising. Handbills and street posters increased - bill posting became a large and organised trade. Later that century advertisers even used hot air balloons to advertise products. More attention was given to the design and layout of advertisements, especially with regard to typography. The long, superfluous sentences and generally longwinded style of eighteenth century advertising was being replaced by words set out in blocks, using contrasting typefaces and increased linespacing. The art of copywriting was born which improved the language of advertisements. Traders even hired poets to write suitably descriptive prose.

Some restrictions affected the design of advertisements in newspapers. They were not allowed to extend beyond the width of a standard column as it was thought this would disrupt the design of the page. Manufacturers employed ingenious, if tedious methods to exploit and ridicule the editors fear of bold type and display layout. Repetition was one common device used. Some advertisements repeated the firm products name for up to one thousand lines. Phrases were printed in eye catching patterns which still preserved column rule. Another device used was to build large capital letters from groupings of smaller letters. These column restrictions in the press forced manufacturers to turn to outdoor advertising where there were no limitations on creativity and ingenuity.

The food processing industry was launched around the middle of the nineteenth century. The mid to late nineteenth century marks a crucial stage in the development of some commodities and markets, a period when many current brand names began. For the first time in history it became possible to make far more of common things than anyone needed. Up to this there was no need for branding.







Soap was soap, and local makers made just enough of whatever was needed. With the development of the factory system, goods were mass produced and sales had to increase enormously by creating new needs. To make these changes in the market, producers had to make the products into branded commodities. People would have to distinguish between similar products, and choose for reasons other than price alone. This led to huge attention in advertisements of this period to uncounterfeitable trademarks and packaging. Thanks to advertising, names like Bovril, Nestle, Cadbury, Fry and Kellogg became household words. Testimonials from famous people of the day were used to stress the pure and healthy nature of their products. New mechanical inventions such as bicycles, sewing machines and typewriters were also advertised widely. Established painters also contributed to the "art" of publicity. In France poster art was highly regarded, but in Britain, artists were initially unwilling to venture into the world of commerce. In 1886, A&F Pears bought a picture by Sir John Everett Millais and used it in an advertisement for soap. Many members of the public were hostile to this prostitution of art. Advertisements at this time catered for contemporary taste. They were unashamedly sentimental, using images of children, animals, flowers and young women.

Two important trends in advertising emerged in the 1880s. The first was that a number of advertising agencies transferred their loyalty from the newspaper to the advertiser. Secondly, some editors relaxed their strict rule about single columns and began to allow display advertisements in their papers. Larger typefaces were used and the advertisements sometimes spanned two or more columns. Illustrated advertisements were introduced into magazines from the 1880s onwards and street posters lined the streets of Victorian England. Both developments were thought to have influenced the editors.

The new magazines were the first medium really created to fit advertising's needs. A higher quality of reproduction and more complex interactions of language and image were now possible. Advertisements could be tailored to specific audiences, depending on the readership of a magazine. The advertising business





underwent a crucial reorganisation. Advertising agents, now working for the producer, were able to make advertising outlets compete against each other, planning coherent campaigns and specialising in such functions as copy writing.

The advertisements of the late nineteenth century now focused on making a brand and getting attention. They repeated the names, claims and picture of the product. They were direct. If such advertisements were successful it was largely because they were seen more often. They had widespread exposure - on walls, in bigger letters and repeated more times in a newspaper column. Competition for the consumers notice and for space were priorities. Linguistic strategies included having a catchy slogan, choosing a product name with favourable associations, repeating claims using vague comparatives and drawing on scientific and technical discourse. However, the full range of play with language, such as puns, were not found until a later date. 1898 saw the founding of S.C.A.P.A. (The Society for the Checking of Abuses in Public Advertising) which was a reaction against eyesores and publicity stunts.

The depression of 1873 - 1894 brought on a crisis of over production and under consumption. Towards the end of the century, many of the small industrial firms combined with other small businesses, to widen the range of goods they produced. The markets were controlled by a small number of giant conglomerate enterprises. After the depression the larger manufacturing units relied more on mass advertising to promote their new range of products. Advertise or bust was the rule of the day.

As the twentieth century progressed, advertising adopted American techniques such as psychology, which was known then as the new "science". Advertising was now referred to as a profession and a public science. Gillian Dyer records how an American psychologist advised advertisers that advertisements should be presented in such a way that a reader would associate it with his own experience.<sup>4</sup> He stressed that advertisements should be cheerful with products linked to prosperity, social status and attractiveness. These psychological methods were





used to great effect during the first World War to recruit volunteers to the armed services.

In 1918 the war was over and factories once again turned their attention to the production of consumer goods. Business leaders after World War One were terrified that there would be a large scale depression as war consumption ended and soldiers returned to work. In the U.S.A. new commodities were produced for consumers. Cheap cars were manufactured using assembly line production. At the same time there were changes in the media. The new medium of radio was shaped entirely by and for advertisers. Ad agencies became big business. All of these innovations drew on the simple idea that if one is selling soaps, one's markets are limited because the world can only use so much soap. However, if one is selling a better life, there are endless markets: people will always be dissatisfied.

The economic depression of the late 1920s and '30s stemmed the activities of money advertisers. However, for some, business flourished. It was a period of nerve warfare: advertisements for nerve tonic and vitamin pills were as lurid and exaggerated as the "quacks" of the eighteenth century. It was a desperate attempt to attract public attention. The growing absurdity of many advertisements drew the scorn of critics and writers of the 1930s. As a response to the criticism and satire, advertisements began to display a certain kind of self mockery and cynicism.

Wartime brought a check to the rapidly expanding industry. Many advertisements of the Second World War stressed economy and self denial. The image of women in advertising underwent a fundamental change, as they were now vital to the economy. They were portrayed as more capable, rather than passive consumers. However, all that changed in 1945, when women were urged to go back to domestic life, to make way for returning soldiers whose jobs they had been filling.







The post war period of the 1950s, brought with it a boom in advertising. Expanding rapidly alongside was the media of mass communication. Consumer goods flooded onto the market. There were scores of new products, particularly domestic ones. There was a boom in women's periodicals lasting into the '60s where the focus of attention was the role of women in the home. A further area of expansion which opened up during this time was the clothes and makeup market. With the 1960s came the growth of the teenage market and the emergence of many teenage glossy magazines. However, perhaps the most significant aspect of post war advertising was caused by the coming of television.

The product jungle was one promotional method quickly adopted by television advertisers. Television replaced radio as the major broadcasting medium, providing an alternative commercial network. The combination of sound and vision assured the message great force and impact. Advertisers knew in advance what the programming schedules were going to be and were able to select space for their commercials next to specific programmes. Television companies were set to make enormous profit from advertising.

As advertisements of the 1920s tried to deal with saturation of the market, advertisements of the 1960s tried to deal with saturation of the consumer. Advertisements were now competing for attention in a world where they were everywhere. More recently there has been an extension of advertising to new kinds of service commodities such as advertisements for university courses, hospitals and long distance telephoning. There has also been an extension of sports and the arts. The line between advertising and the rest of culture is now very hard to define. There is no indication when looking at a Benetton advertisement that it is an advertisement for clothes.

To stimulate the jaded consumer, advertisers now use ironies, parodies, puns, juxtapositions and a dominance of image over text. The illustrated commodity is often shown as grotesquely enlarged. There is a great deal of continuity in





advertising history. It is essentially a pile of layers upon layers. Today we still see celebrity endorsements used one hundred years ago and associations with high culture, as well as language recalling the “quacks” of the eighteenth century.

### **I (ii) The Effects of Advertising**

The question of whether ‘ads’ influence people is ... of concern to the general public, to teachers, politicians and policy makers.<sup>5</sup>

Dyer (1982) observes that producing an advertisement involves a mixture of market research, professional skill, personal knowledge and intuition. It is argued in *Advertising as Communication*, that advertisements define style and good taste and create desirable goals. By its very existence then, advertising provides the kinds of people we could be and the kinds of lives we lead. Dyer argues that advertisements manipulate us into thinking that we can buy a way of life as well as goods. It could be argued that advertisements are essentially a form of escapism. They teach us ways of thinking and feeling generally through fantasy and daydreaming. It could be further suggested that the success of advertising depends not on its logical propositions but on the kinds of fantasies it offers.

The world of ‘ads’ is a dream world where people and objects are taken out of their material context ... we are invited to live an unreal life through .... ‘ads’.

Advertisements, with their witty catchphrases and vivid, if stereotyped imagery are idyllic and alluring. Dyer supports this view and suggests that advertisements offer a “preferred reading” by presenting us with characters we can identify with along with general meanings about what should be admired and desired. People may not actually buy the specific product but because of the hedonistic lifestyle promoted, they are encouraged to think in terms of escape from the real world. Marcuse (1968) argues that the media define the terms in which we think. His definition of escapism in advertising suggests that advertisements inhibit or confine conceptual thought by encouraging us to live in a world of hypnotic definitions.<sup>6</sup>







It is fair to say that recent technological improvements have dramatically influenced visual representations of reality, i.e. advertising. Historian Daniel Boorstin (1963) claims that the character of the image has changed due to the printing and broadcasting revolution.<sup>7</sup> ref? As a result, images conveyed by the media have become more sophisticated and persuasive. In pre-war advertising the words carried the message. The visual imagery tended to be crude and simplistic. What is seen today is this situation, reversed. Through the medium of television as well as magazines we are exposed to a world packed with spectacular and exciting images. Boorstin promotes the idea of escapism, arguing that advertisements encourage extravagant expectations because their images are more dramatic and vivid than reality.<sup>8</sup> The significance of the image is a view also upheld by Dyer (1982). She suggests that advertisements are hard to resist because they offer the chance to obtain perfection. Perfect relationships, handsome lovers, luxurious surroundings, appreciative husbands and happy kids are the reality of advertisements but the unreality of life. She argues that people tend to remember images first and foremost over the claims made on behalf of the product and concludes that it is these images which make advertisements so successful. There can be little doubt that advertisements present us with spectacular illusions but it is also fair to say that ultimately, these illusions don't satisfy. "Truth in Advertising" is a concept supported by Myers (1994). He observes that, as free individuals, we can be persuaded to do anything. However, furthering his argument he claims that bad advertisements are those that try to violate this free individuality, those advertisements which lie or mislead or use subliminal messages.<sup>9</sup>

Dyer (1982) regards the issue of truth in advertising as a core matter for concern. She argues that all advertising discussions will come back to the same question, of whether soft toilet paper will actually make a woman a better wife and mother. It is her conclusion that advertisements make promises which keep people from reading what the root causes of social and personal problems are, and from knowing what they really want. The Advertising Standards Authority (A.S.A.) states that advertisements should be "legal, clean, honest and truthful".<sup>10</sup> Advertisers rarely perpetrate downright lies. The advertisements in magazines, newspapers and posters are bound by a code of practice administered by the A.S.A. The A.S.A. judge the validity of complaints that come from the general public.





However, many advertisements fall through the net. Dyer points out that it is often not the overt message of an ad that is misleading or dangerous but its subtle, hidden message, which we can presume the A.S.A. is unable or unwilling to do much about.

British research suggests that advertisements are not ever approximately accurate in reflecting the real nature of sex roles.<sup>11</sup> In general, it is fair to argue that, at least during the last forty years, advertisements reflect the dominant social values where women are not important, except in the home. This is a view supported by Williamson (1983) who interprets the male voice-over for female products as a subtle reminder that men know best.<sup>12</sup> Television commercials clearly portray sex-role stereotypes and according to some researchers repeated exposure must influence the learning of stereotypical sex roles. We need only think of the numerous advertisements for washing powder where, even in 1996, women are still thrilled at the sight of white sheets.

Advertising attaches social meanings to goods. Dyer (1982) suggests that personal and social meanings are associated with goods which validate consumer commodities and a consumer lifestyle. She makes the observation that we, the consumers, are isolated from the real world by the media, hence we seek images from the media to give us a sense of social reality. We come to think that consuming commodities will give us our identities. She then concludes that we become part of the symbolism of the advertising world and are identified in terms of what we consume. Advertising tries to manipulate people into buying a way of life as well as goals. Dyer sees that advertising's central function is to create desires that previously did not exist. Critics of advertising share this view, claiming that advertisements create false wants, and that they usually suggest that private acquisition is the only avenue to social success and happiness.<sup>13</sup> It could be argued that nowadays advertising fulfils a function traditionally met by art or religion. The champions of advertising say that people are free to ignore advertisements and that they do not brainwash people. This claim is backed up by the fact that a number of advertising campaigns fail to attract customers. Also those in favour of advertisements promote the view that they benefit society by raising people's standard of living, stimulating production and creating



employment and prosperity. It is important to realise that the influence of advertisements are very strong, even if we don't actually believe what they say about this or that product.<sup>14</sup>

In some respects the impact of advertising is all too obvious: as noted elsewhere children sing jingles instead of nursery rhymes at an early age.<sup>15</sup> The effects of advertising on society over a long period of time, however is hard to assess. It is probably true to say that consciously most people are sceptical of advertising. Dyer notes how many people would deny that they are influenced by advertisements and would regard them "at worst as lies, but at best as idiot triviality". The danger is that although they may not believe claims made in an advertisement, they could find it difficult to resist the more general social image or message passed on, such as making friends by drinking a certain kind of beer. Myers (1982) observes the difficulty in finding anything definite linking advertisements to behaviour. Despite the enormous amount of money spent on effects research it is hard to get concrete answers. Yet this money is spent because these effects are crucial to the whole advertising business. The companies doing the advertising want to know if they are getting their money's worth and the agencies want to know which approaches work better than others. The broadcasters and publishers want to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their particular medium. Dyer (1982) suggests that it is more than likely that the effects of advertisements are diffuse and long term. She claims there to be some evidence that advertising plays part in defining 'reality' in a general sense.

The media and its audience are part of a complex social structure and are not stimulus response mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> It is important to point out that advertisements are part of a flow or pattern of culture and are certainly not the only influences in people's lives. The audience are made up of members from different social and class groups. It could be argued that a person's class or family relationship can act like a filtering mechanism, making them less vulnerable.

Discussion of advertising's cultural affects is not a new phenomenon. F.R. Leavis, the distinguished 1930s literary critic, accused the popular media, in particular advertising, of evoking cheap, almost mechanical emotional responses. He warned that advertisements







corrupted feelings, debased language, exploited people's emotional needs and fears and encouraged greed, snobbery and social conformity.<sup>17</sup> Admittedly Leavis's writings on culture and society were faintly puritanical and reflected his general fear of modern mass culture. Regardless, his criticisms of advertising still have some force and relevance today and he did draw attention to what he considered to be "the numbing effect that advertisements have on people's critical responses to their environment".<sup>18</sup>

Today research departments use questionnaires, in depth interviews, focus group discussions and cleverly split runs of print advertisements to establish effects of advertising. Despite this methodological sophistication there is still a great deal of scepticism about any finding of effects research. Part of the problem with any audience research is that there is not one audience but many and it can be hard to tell which audience one is addressing. Another problem is that the research often addresses quite different effects with apparently conflicting results. Advertising researchers warn against confusing recall with effects. Enjoyment of character does not lead to identification with the product. Critics could argue that producers intentions are not the same as audience effects. Plenty of advertisement campaigns, successful or not, have had quite unpredictable and unintentional effects.

Dyer (1982) identifies three different perspectives on the effects of advertising. The first concerns the influence of advertisements on the individual. Evidence is looked for the ability of the advertising media to shape and sometimes change a person's behaviour, opinions and attitudes. The second is the effect on society as a whole - providing an escapism from the real world. The third is that the utopian imagery of advertisements encourages passivity and makes people unaware of the extent to which they are controlled by consumerism. As a result they are unable to determine the terms of their own existence.

Williamson (1983) describes how market research involves the advertiser through an agency in researching the effects or likely effectiveness of a campaign. When an agency has accepted an account from a client, one of the first things to do is to survey the market to find out something about the possible customers. The researchers are looking to establish what the customer needs and wants from a particular product, whether they will buy what





will eventually go on sale and what the best ways of influencing them via an advertising campaign might be. Questionnaires are given to a cross section of people. Sometimes prospective consumers are interviewed by psychologists trained to analyse deep, or psychological motivations and attitudes. Clients and agents also want to know that people have bought the goods after a campaign. This can be done by looking at sales figures and estimating if the campaign had the desired effect among a certain group of people in a specific area. Again questionnaires can be administered after the launching of a campaign and people asked if an advertisement influenced their purchasing decisions. Market research of this type is designed to provide quick "post-exposure" results to determine if a "stimulus" (advertisement) has achieved a "response" (a purchase). The methods used by market researchers to test and discover consumer behaviour and attitudes have become very sophisticated over the years and they include a battery of research techniques, computerised data analysis and demographic statistics. However, their notion of effects is defined quite narrowly and the assumption that lies behind much of this type of research is that anybody can be persuaded if the right techniques are used.

There have been studies which have tried to detect any difference in impact on different age groups. Some research on media / audience relationships suggest that the audience is much less passive than might be thought. If a person leads an active, varied life and is secure and stable, no amount of advertising which appeals to fears of loneliness or of being a social outcast, or to social snobbery, will succeed. Some research has shown that a member of the audience cannot be affected by the media if they do not fulfil or gratify a need. It could be argued that adolescents are a particularly vulnerable section of the audience, a point which is central to this dissertation.

The following information has been selected from a youth market survey carried out in October 1994 by Irish Marketing Surveys (I.M.S.) and should prove pertinent. A sample range of one thousand is taken from the youth population of the Republic of Ireland aged between ten and twenty four, both male and female. The survey notes that age is a very potent behavioural discriminator and so it subdivides the group into three distinct age







categories. Post Junior Certificate students shall be the target for the research conducted in Chapter III, so the age group encompassing fifteen to nineteen year olds is most relevant.

How young people spend their time is a valuable indicator to researchers of what interests them and what they are exposed to. Amongst the sample investigating youth lifestyles, listening to music and watching videos are the most popular activities undertaken by fifteen to nineteen year olds. 72% and 64% of this age category visit fast food restaurants and go to night-clubs respectively (see Table 1.1).

Fuller (1994) of the I.M.S. Limited describes how research can be designed to evaluate ideas which can be used for an advertising execution, a new product or a packaging concept. This type of research, she cautions, should bear in mind that teenagers are extremely conservative. They dislike being different. Peer group pressure is strong and a sense of belonging is important.<sup>19</sup> This supports the argument that teenagers are particularly vulnerable members of society. Qualitative research explores the potential of new ideas in advertising and evaluates the extent to which they are in tune with the mood and spirit of youth. Fuller notes that the current Levi 501 commercial entitled 'Washroom' is the fruit of a researcher's labour.<sup>20</sup> This features a tough, gritty female protagonist and a blind man in a washroom scene. She provocatively fastens her buttonfly in front of his face and runs out. The audience then discover that the blind man was not actually blind and cannot believe his luck. The advertising agency, Bartle Bogle Hegarty developed the 'Washroom' film out of a rather less exciting script. The original was based on an upper class girl obliged to change into jeans having splashed oil on her dress. The whole feel of the setting and scenario was safer and more familiar. The characters and setting required an edge to appeal to the teen audience. It bears witness to how qualitative research is used to design specific advertisements to target particular age groups. The 'Washroom' commercial is sequenced like a movie clip and its fore runner 'Spaceman' (see Chapter III) bears more than a faint resemblance to contemporary music videos. The fact that music and watching video films happened to be listed as the most popular activities undertaken regularly by young people is not merely coincidental (see Table 1.1).



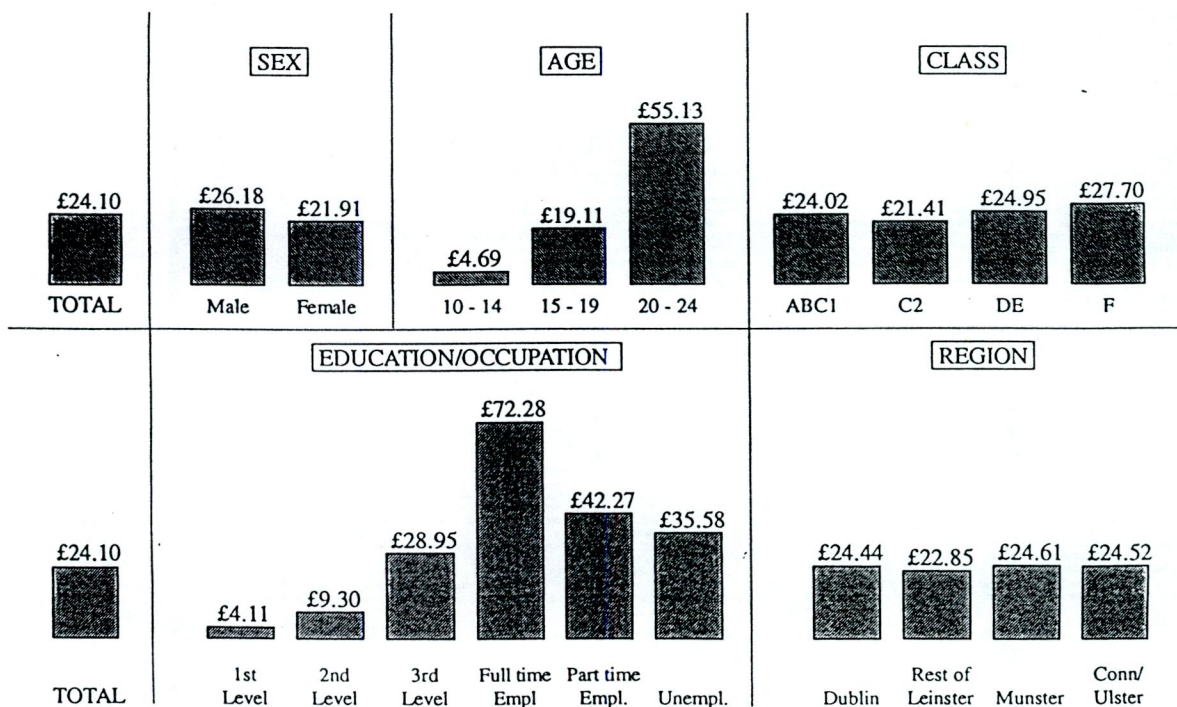


**Table 1.1 Activities Undertaken Regularly**

	10 -24 YEARS OLDS	AGE		
		10 - 14	15 - 19	20 -24
		%	%	%
Listen to music/watch music videos	88%	85	92	89
Watch video films	85%	87	86	83
Go to church	71%	(89)	70	51
Read any books	67%	(78)	60	62
Visit fast food restaurants	66%	58	(72)	(69)
Go to the cinema	58%	53	59	62
Exercise	57%	62	56	51
Go watch sport	57%	60	60	49
Take part in sport	54%	(73)	53	33
Dance/nightclubs	49%	13	64	(78)
Go to pub/bar	39%	3	40	(86)
Play video games at home	39%	(59)	35	17

Youth Market Survey Compiled by I.M.S. Ltd., October 1994

**Table 1.2 Average Weekly Spending Money**



Youth Market Survey Compiled by I.M.S. Ltd., October 1994



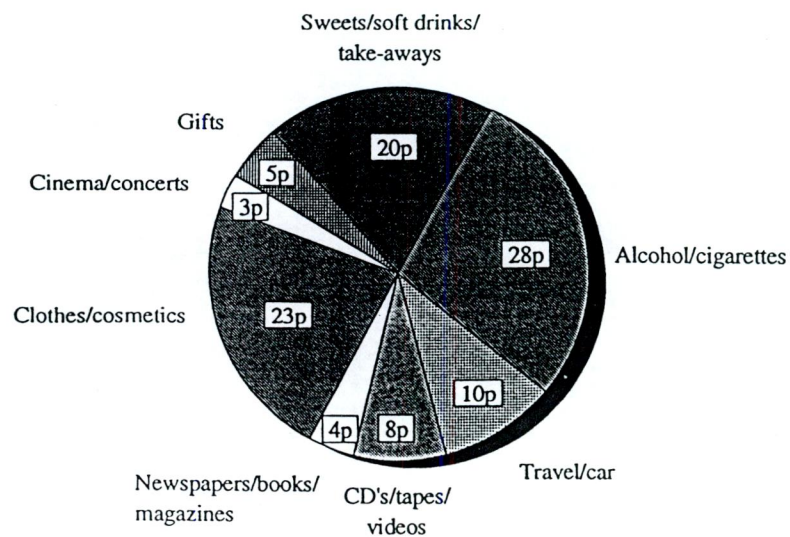


**Table 1.3 How Young People Spend Their Money**

	10 - 24 YEARS OLDS	AGE		
		10 - 14 %	15 - 19 %	20 - 24 %
Chocolates/sweets/crisps	72%	75	75	62
Soft drinks	65%	61	72	62
Take-away foods	47%	31	56	57
Newspapers/books/magazines	35%	26	31	50
Hire of video tapes	31%	16	36	45
Alcoholic drinks	30%	1	24	74
Fares/travelling expenses	26%	10	34	38
Cigarettes/tobacco	20%	4	20	40
Cosmetics/personal hygiene	20%	3	21	41
Clothes/shoes	19%	5	20	37
Cinema/theatre/concerts	16%	10	17	24
Gifts	11%	7	12	15
CD's/records/tapes	9%	2	11	15
Petrol/upkeep of car	7%	1	3	20

Youth Market Survey Compiled by I.M.S. Ltd., October 1994

**Table 1.4 An Average Pound - Where Does It Go?**



Youth Market Survey Compiled by I.M.S. Ltd., October 1994





Regardless of how effective advertising campaigns might be, they are all for nothing if teenagers do not have any spending power. The results of the youth market survey on spending money can be seen in Table 1.2. The average weekly spending money of ten to twenty year olds is £24.10 but this amount is subject to age, class and educational/occupational status. Looking at the table, teenagers in the fifteen to nineteen age bracket have, on average, £19.11 to spend each week, but if looking solely at second level students they have on average £9.30. However, once students complete their Junior Certificate the likelihood of extra income from weekend and summer jobs increases.

The I.M.S. also surveyed the spending behaviour of the youth population over a period of seven days. From Table 1.3 it is obvious that sweets and soft drinks are the two most popular purchase categories for the fifteen to nineteen year old. As young people advance through their teenage years they tend to spend more money on expensive items such as clothes and shoes. Table 1.4 is an analysis of what the average pound is spent on. While alcohol, cigarettes, clothes, cosmetics and gifts did not feature too prominently on the list of most popular purchase categories, they together absorb two thirds of youth expenditure simply because they cost so much.

The I.M.S. youth survey also included a battery of thirty one statements relating to a variety of media, personal, social, health and environmental issues. Respondents had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The youth showed a mixed, but, on balance, positive agreement with the following statement: "I am tempted to buy products I have seen advertised". They also show a mixed, but, on balance, negative disagreement with the following statements: "I rarely notice advertisements" and "On television I enjoy the advertisements as much as the programmes".

It could be argued that media consumption is an indicator of how exposed adolescents are to advertising. Young people watch approximately fifteen hours of television every week, equating to slightly more than two hours each day, according to the I.M.S. They have found television viewing behaviour to be reasonably consistent across sex, age and social class groups. It is reported that teenagers in the fifteen to nineteen age





bracket watch an average fourteen hours, twenty nine minutes of television each week. The I.M.S. survey also found that the magazines *Smash Hits* and *Just Seventeen* were read by 14% and 18% respectively of those in the fifteen to nineteen age bracket. However, it was found that these particular magazines were read by a huge majority of females and a tiny minority of males. 'Serious' music magazines allowed for a more balanced readership. The results of the I.M.S. survey are useful in establishing a picture of how young people like to spend their time and money. Hence, the type of advertisements which they are most likely to be effected by, and which they are most exposed to, can be determined. This will come under further discussion in Chapter III.

Motivated Research (M.R.) is a type of psychological warfare developed to probe people's unconscious sales resistance. Depth interviews, projective tests and "living laboratories" are research techniques which have been developed to uncover a person's hidden anxieties and insecurities, guilt feelings or secret desires. Women have been targets for M.R., since traditionally they make most purchases in society. According to Dockard (1970), advertisements which flatter consumers and which disguise the emptiness and drudgery of much household work (thereby glorifying the role of housewife), are guaranteed a certain amount of success.<sup>21</sup>

In the '60s the Frankfurt School, a group of writers and academics, responded to advertising in a radical way. This group no longer exists, but their thesis had a great deal of influence on the long term impact of mass culture. One of their conclusions was that advertising, or the commodity culture, encouraged social and political apathy, although offering a better material standard of living and certain comforts and gratifications. Herbert Marcuse (1968) was one of the writers of the Frankfurt school and he claimed that the manipulation of false needs is repressive. He wrote

Free choice among a wide variety of these goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear - that is they sustain alienation.<sup>22</sup>







Alienation is a concept referring to the mental and physical separation of people from each other and from real involvement with their work and society . It could be argued that the modern social world dehumanises and alienates people, while modern mass culture, including advertising, attempts to conceal or compensate for the deficiencies in a person's real social and personal life.

Marcuse also tackles the question of language in advertising. He reckons that advertisements use hypnotic and intimidatory language and imagery. Its propositions assume the form of suggestive commands and at the same time the language is tinged with false familiarity. He believes the media define the terms in which we think.<sup>23</sup> Myers (1994) supports this view recognising the generally informal and colloquial context of advertising language. He points out the simply constructed short sentences and frequent imperative claims such as "Buy X" and "Discover Y". In television commercials there is an even greater tendency towards the abbreviated or disjunctive mode of discourse. Due to a short timespan (7/15 seconds) and the combined power and impact of visual and auditory material the spoken word often plays a relatively minor role.<sup>24</sup> Some commercials have no speech at all, just a slogan for an endline. Interviews with people such as the washing powder advertisements, act as testimonials for products. Dyer (1982) argues that the language used in advertisements target people on which they wish to make an impact, thereby not treating them as human beings. She concludes that the language used in advertisements is subtle and cajoling and observes that the terms for advertisers' work is aggressive - marketing is called a weapon and advertising is doing battle on the sales front.

Some of the research into advertising's effects has investigated the change in peoples' attitudes, values or behaviour brought about as a result of exposure to advertisements. On the positive side some of the effects research has looked at any possible functions that advertisements might have for audiences, whether they are considered to be informative, fulfil any needs and give satisfaction to audiences. Early effects research concentrated on finding evidence of the short term impact of the media message. The media influence is implied to be like a hypodermic needle which injects a message into the mind of the audience. However, this idea came up for some criticism due to being





conducted under experimental conditions in laboratories. Dyer (1982) suggests that research which looks for immediate responses to a single stimulus like an advertisement is probably over simplified, although scientifically controllable. Not all of advertising's effects can be observed in the short term or under experimental conditions. In fact, there is some evidence that the effects of advertising on people are complicated by a number of factors, and that people do not always reveal their responses to advertisements under interrogation from a sociologist.

As a result most of market research is "pre-sell". The methodology required in "post-sell" research is weak and limited. It relies on street and door to door interviews with no guarantees of truth. However, it seems to be the case that advertising is generally successful, as you can normally chart a growth in the sales of a product after an increase in advertising. Of course this isn't always true: sometimes we buy things after a rational decision that they are a useful thing to have. Thus, when considering effectiveness, it is difficult to prove any short-term and one to one effects of advertising. The economic and instituted power of advertising registers across the whole movement of a society, in social and economic institutions and in the styles and values of popular culture and art.

Many critics of modern consumer / popular culture argue that the real impact of advertising is on the cultural climate of society. There are indications of a mix between the language and values of advertising and forms of communication in modern society such as commercial cinema, television programmes and popular literature. Dyer (1982) points out that prose in popular magazines adapts the tricks and styles of advertising, copy and imagery.

Certain values such as love, friendship, neighbourliness, pleasure, happiness and sexual attraction are the staple diet of advertisements. These are often confused with or transferred to the possession of things as in the phrase "A diamond is forever". Obviously the love for someone and for something is not the same thing. Dyer observes the lack of distinction made between the two in advertising. Williamson (1983) argues that advertisements corrupt and devalue genuine feelings, allowing acceptable words to be used





loosely and falsely. She sees a mutual transfer between the formulae of commercials and separate programmes. Items in radio and television and news bulletins contain a kind of encapsulated information like that used in advertisements.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Myers, *The Image Makers: Secrets of Successful Advertising* (London, Orbis, 1984), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Dyer, *Advertising as Communications* (London: Methuen, 1982), p.28.

<sup>4</sup> Dyer, *Advertising*, p.75.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Myers, *Words in Ads* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p.42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.192.

<sup>10</sup> Dyer, *Advertising*, p.75.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements - Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyers, 1983), p.35.

<sup>13</sup> Dyer, *Advertising*, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, p.31.

<sup>15</sup> Simatos, *Children and Media* (Liverpool: Manutins Press, 1992), p.28.

<sup>16</sup> Dyer, *Advertising*, p.76.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.80, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Kathy Fuller, *Talking to Teens: The Confidence Game* (Dublin: An article published by I.M.S. Limited, 1994), p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>21</sup> Dyer, *Advertising*, p.76.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>24</sup> Myers, *Words in Ads*, p.199.

<sup>25</sup> Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, p.28.





## CHAPTER II

### ART EDUCATION AND THE MASS MEDIA

#### Introduction

In this chapter the media is recognised as an important educational institution. The responsibility of the art educator is considered in an increasingly visual world, and a case is made for the promotion of visual literacy in schools.

All of us have to meet the circumstances of life in a given society and the purposes of education are to enable people to do this effectively<sup>1</sup>.

#### II (i) Art Education and the Mass Media

It could be argued that the state of art in schools, has until recently, not been entirely healthy. Benson (1979) reports how the arts have been neglected in Irish education.<sup>2</sup> In 1961 the Irish schoolchild was reported to be visually and artistically among the most undereducated in Europe. The *Report of the Council of Design* in 1965 stated that indifference to the importance of good design in every aspect of the school has been part of an educational tradition in which art as a whole has been gravely undervalued<sup>3</sup>.

Societies differ in what they regard as art and in what they consider the function of art to be. This view is supported by McFee (1970) who comments on the state of art education in American society. She observes how, in a time of intense social change such as advances in communication and transport, it is possible for educators to be overwhelmed into inaction.<sup>4</sup> There is the danger of teachers isolating themselves by believing that their area of education is not involved. McFee argues that our reaction depends on our concepts of the nature of art and its relationship to humanity. We could believe that art is only for the intellectual elite which would promote social isolation of the arts.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively we could consider art as a phenomenon of human behaviour to be found wherever form, line and colour are used to create symbols for communication. If the latter is chosen we are







accepting the fact that art is related in some degree to all of society. McFee argues that art educators should recognise art as one of the major communication systems of social interaction and of society in transition.<sup>6</sup> This view is supported by Benson who purports that art represents and interprets a society to itself. He suggests that the good artist communicates insights to his public, which lead to a heightened perception of life within a society.<sup>7</sup>

It could be argued that perceptual efficiency, an undeniably valuable area of human potential has never yet been considered seriously by educators. Hubbard (1970) sees this as the responsibility of the art educator. In his opinion, it is just as important to teach people to see more effectively as it is to teach art as a subject in its own right.<sup>8</sup> He argues that art educators are the only people in schools who are potentially capable of developing the senses of vision and touch, in order that students may learn how to use them productively.

Hubbard strongly supports the need for art educators to ensure that students are made consciously aware of their visual environment.<sup>9</sup> This visual environment includes mass media. When educators talk of mass media they do so in two ways. The first is simply how they can use films, videos and magazine articles to buttress classroom teaching. The second is how the mass media have become schools greatest competitors.<sup>10</sup> The second is more realistic. Gans (1970) has illustrated how the mass media can be seen to take children's interests and energy away from their studies. These energies are then diverted into frivolous time wasting and intellectually or emotionally harmful pursuits.<sup>11</sup> In seeing the media as a competitor, educators rightly acknowledge that they are an important educational institution. Mass media also teaches and in some ways is an even more important educational institution than the school. It outranks it in terms of size of operation, audience, diverse course content and intensity of interest. The schools argue that they are the major transmitter of society's moral values, yet mass media offer a great deal more content on this topic. Gans claims that the mass media differ most sharply from school in that it trains children in how to consume and play, and how to be family members. He argues that commercials are a never ending course about the goods available in society and how to use them. Advertisements and television programs, films and magazines teach







children how people behave in their off hours and with their families.<sup>12</sup> The mass media are more effective at reaching their youthful audience. Many children bother their mothers to buy products they have seen advertised on television. Gans concluded in his research that children should learn more of the culture of mass media.<sup>13</sup>

According to McFee (1970) popular culture and mass media contain a myriad of examples where the elements and principles of art are used. Much of commercial illustration (i.e that found in advertisements) contain form, line, colour and texture in some kind of composition or design. These combine to express ideas or feelings.<sup>14</sup> Through advertising mass media purports to identify the so called "good life" which anyone can achieve if they buy the right products. These rising expectations are one of the most powerful forces affecting the future of mankind.<sup>15</sup> McFee argues that advertisements distorted picture of the "good life" creates hostility and frustrations among the economically deprived. She observes that

The major question which the impact of television and mass media in society raises for us is whether we do, or can, give students the tools with which to evaluate the obvious and the subtle messages of this one way communication system. We have the obligation to try to offer students more alternatives. This requires that we be aware of what they are receiving; that we analyse the art form being used so that we may help them develop and use aesthetic criteria in their evaluations.<sup>16</sup>

Basically it is the art educator's responsibility to develop students' evaluative criteria for responding to all the visual arts. Art education should, according to McFee, help students discriminate and evaluate the symbolical communication of mass media to preserve independent judgement. A beginning should be made by attempting to start where they are, with what is important to them. She concluded in her research that if art is not related to their own past experience, the beginning experiences upon which further learnings in art can be built will not take place.<sup>17</sup>

In 1995 The Department of Education published *The White Paper* which set out educational aims incorporating individual and societal development. Thankfully the state of





art education in Ireland has improved since the *Art Council* report of 1979. Second level education now aims to prepare students for adult life. The Junior Certificate, introduced in 1989, produces a single unified programme for students aged broadly between 12/15 years. Among other things students are encouraged to make connections between the varying facets of their educational experiences.<sup>18</sup> The junior cycle is more student centred and is based on the following curricular principles: under the heading of "Reference" the curriculum should provide for the immediate and future needs of the student in the context of their cultural, economic and social environment. The objective will be that on completion of the junior cycle all students will have achieved a knowledge and appreciation of their social, cultural and physical heritage and environment. *The White Paper* views the creative and performing arts as distinctive and intrinsically valuable educational disciplines. The junior cycle curriculum regards arts and culture as key elements within the school experience of young people and regards them as having an important role to play in contributing to the school ethos and its place in the local community.<sup>19</sup>

In the light of what is discussed in this chapter it is reasonable to suggest that mass media is significant in shaping modern life. Advertising encompasses quite a section of mass media. It is an art educator's responsibility to develop students' evaluative criteria for responding to all the visual arts, so it could be argued that students with an art education should be more visually literate and therefore better equipped to read advertisements than those with none.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Hubbard, "A Revision of Purposes for Art Education", in *Concepts in Art and Education - An anthology of current issues*, ed. George Pappas (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), p.248.

<sup>2</sup> Ciaran Benson, *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* (Dublin: The Arts Council, 1979), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> June King McFee, "Society, Art and Education", in *Concepts of Art and Education*, ed. George Pappas (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), p.72.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Benson, *Place of the Arts*, p.14.

<sup>8</sup> Hubbard, *Concepts in Art and Education*, p.249.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert J. Gans, "The Mass Media as an Educational Institution", in *Concepts in Art and Education*, ed. George Pappas (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), p.319.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.323.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.332.





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<sup>14</sup> McFee, *Concepts in Art and Education*, p.73.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>18</sup> The Department of Education, *Chartering our Education Future - White Paper on Education* (Dublin: Government Publications, 1995), p.45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.50.





## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The research carried out here is intended merely as an exploration of ideas. A more concrete study would be beyond the scope of this dissertation. The intention is to promote the idea that an education in art, craft and design increase the visual literacy of the student. Mass media particularly television and magazine advertising, largely depends on the visual communication of messages. Art education aims to develop students' evaluative criteria for responding to the visual arts, including advertising. Hence, students' responses to advertising are the topic for research here. The hypothesis formed was that, as a result of the intended increase in the visual literacy of art, craft and design students, it should follow that they can 'read' (understand, be less duped by) advertisements better than those without an art education. This chapter will include a discussion on the relevant sections of the art syllabus and a description and analysis of the case study undertaken to prove or disprove this hypothesis.

#### **III (i) Visual Literacy**

An education in art, craft and design aims to promote a heightened visual awareness of our environment. Michael (1983) explains perceptual sensitivity as experiencing the world through our senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and moving. He describes how art experiences force a sensitivity and an awareness because one must be concerned with the uniqueness of the particular to create or appreciate art.

When drawing an object we have to study it in detail, it's observed under many differing conditions and we must see the art elements of line, shape, colour, texture, pattern, rhythm/balance, order and variation.<sup>1</sup>





He describes how many students have told him how they looked at the door of their home for years but never really saw it until they were asked to draw it. This is because art expression brings a keenness of total sensory awareness. He concluded that a more intense use of the senses could be called the development of visual literacy.<sup>2</sup>

Allison (1978) argues that an education in art means considerably more than being able to manipulate some art materials skilfully and expressively. It means to be perceptually developed and visually discriminative, which is to be able to realise the relationship of materials to the form and function of art expression and communication, and to be able to critically analyse and appraise art forms and phenomena. Allison also maintains that the acquisition of an art vocabulary is fundamental to learning in art and is necessary to describe, discuss or communicate feelings about art objects.<sup>3</sup>

In schools great emphasis is placed upon verbal communication. However, long before alphabets were developed, drawings were used as communication. Michael (1983) notes how much of contemporary advertising is based upon a rapid form of conveying visual messages.<sup>4</sup> The majority of non art school experiences deal with left brain functions. Art experiences, for the most part, are right brain in nature. Such experiences bring about a balance in the growth, development and education of an individual. Drawing shapes, spaces, curves, angles and lines without recognition is known as perceiving abstractly and involves a shift to the right brain mode.<sup>5</sup> Michael reports how the right brain mode appears to be necessary for the development of visual perception, which results in naturalistic drawings.

Art penetrates to the core of every human activity where there is a concern for how things look, for harmonious order and organisation. Everyone makes aesthetic decisions, like hanging a picture on a wall, but most are not aware of it. Art teachers make people aware of what such choices involve.<sup>6</sup> Art, craft and design is evident in daily life, in clothing, jewellery, television, film, advertising, furniture, houses, cars and city planning. Michael maintains that an understanding and awareness of good design





is consciously and seriously developed only in the art classroom. Art experiences, he argues, involving line, shape, texture and colour, develop an aesthetic awareness which is the basis for making choices as consumers and selectors of various objects and commodities used in our daily lives.<sup>7</sup>

Michael perceives visual arts as a means of knowing and understanding. Art experiences force a person to pay attention to ideas, feelings and perception and in so doing, one develops such insights - one knows and understands. Art expression requires an identification with whatever we draw, paint, sculpt, design or construct and hence we understand better not only ourselves but other people and how they view the world.<sup>8</sup> According to Gombrich (1974)

a visual image is not a mere representation of 'reality' but is a symbolic system. What a picture means to a viewer is always dependent upon his experience or knowledge.

For the purposes of this dissertation, visual literacy with regard to advertising is taken at a number of different levels. The first is that the advertisements are noticed and evaluated critically at a surface level. The second is that the advertisements are 'read' or understood at a deeper level. Those with the greater understanding should be less susceptible to being duped into buying something they don't really need.

### **III (ii) The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus**

An analysis of the art syllabus will focus on the Junior Certificate, as the case study involves a transition year group. Among the aims of *The Junior Certificate Art, Craft and Design Syllabus*, is the intention to promote in the student

an informed, enquiring and a discriminating attitude to his or her environment, and help the student relate to the world in visual ... terms.





Also it aims to develop in the student the ability to apply evaluative criteria to his/her own work and to the work of others and in his/her daily encounters with the mass media.<sup>9</sup>

An art teacher has an obligation to teach the three areas of art, craft and design for the Junior Certificate. In broad terms, what is being taught is a visual language with the art elements such as colour, line and form as the vocabulary. The Junior Certificate requires each student to complete a finished piece in at least two areas of art, craft and design. Irrespective of what area the finished piece will be in, students will use drawing as a method of recording information. They will develop their ideas through imaginative drawing and contact with similar artists work. One idea is chosen, refined and carried through to completion. Analytical drawing forms the foundation for every piece of art, craft and design. This way of thinking and approaching a problem (what the finished piece may look like) is called the design process.

Design encompasses the planning for a piece of art or craft but it is also an end in itself. Graphic design, an increasingly popular option in the Junior Certificate, specifically deals with commercial art. It is directly connected with the 'real world' and the work of graphic designers is visible in advertising campaigns, magazines, television opening sequences and packaging. Image making, manipulation and development and the combination of lettering and image to convey information are the fundamentals of any piece of graphic design. Students at Junior Certificate level are taught how to explore the expressive and emotive qualities of lettering, achieved by using different typefaces, and how to combine lettering with an illustration in various compositions until the best solution is arrived at. The best solution will be the simplest one which communicates the message in a visually interesting way.

Obviously graphic design is the area most directly connected to advertising, but it is the design process in general which promotes visual literacy. *The Junior Certificate Art Syllabus* sees design as the medium through which students are taught





how to analyse design problems, to plan and research, and to use design processes appropriate to the task in hand. Also, design is used to clarify ideas through the use of working drawings, to carry work to completion, and to evaluate the finished work.<sup>10</sup>

Support Studies is the compulsory area on the Junior Certificate course that links the classroom with the outside world. It involves the introduction of the history and appreciation of art, craft and design relevant to the work which the student is completing. Students can relate their work to what they see on the billboards, in shops and on their kitchen tables. The work of other artists and designers should be more meaningful to the student who has now undergone the same design process to complete their finished piece. In the Junior Certificate students must select 'support studies' which have some bearing on their work, critically evaluate it, and acknowledge any influences.

In conclusion, support studies and the design process are the areas on the syllabus which promote the development of visual literacy among students. If visual literacy has been improved, students should now have a greater understanding of images and how the images have been arrived at. Through their own experiences of composition, layout, lettering and the vocabulary of the art elements, students are given the tools with which to critically evaluate images. As a result of their direct experience with the design process other images, such as a magazine advertisement, should be seen as just someone else's idea compositionally arranged for maximum impact. This familiarity with visual communications should make the student less susceptible to being tricked by advertising.

It was decided to monitor student responses to advertising, in order to prove or disprove the hypothesis, that students of art, craft and design can 'read' (understand, be less duped by) advertisements better than those without an art education. The intention is to promote the idea that an education in art, craft and design increases





visual literacy. Advertising was chosen because of its power and potential influence on the vulnerable adolescent.

All young people will engage in mass media - watch 'TV', hear radio, read magazines and newspapers. The majority will live in and through it.<sup>1</sup>

It is important that the educational process is related to the world in which pupils live.

As referred to in Chapter I (ii), market research uses questionnaires in 'pre-sell' research to determine the needs of prospective consumers. 'Post-sell' research uses the questionnaire to determine if a 'stimulus' (advertisement) has achieved a 'response' (a purchase). Thus it was concluded that a questionnaire was the most appropriate method of testing the hypothesis outlined above.

### **III (iii) The Case Study**

A series of four questionnaires were formulated. Two relate to current television commercials and two to current magazine advertisements. They were carefully selected, bearing in mind the results of the Youth Market Survey outlined in Chapter I (ii). This survey found soft drinks to be one of the most popular categories in the 15 - 19 year old group. Consequently two advertisements for soft drinks have been chosen, one taken from television and one from a magazine. It was also established, when analysing what the average pound was spent on, that clothes and shoes featured highly in the breakdown because they are expensive items. Clothes relate to fashion trends, and teenagers are notoriously image-conscious, so clothes and footwear advertisements were chosen.

Again recalling the Youth Market Survey, it was reported that those in the 15 - 19 age category watch, on average, fourteen hours, twenty nine minutes of television a week. The commercials chosen were broadcast regularly in the evening, during prime







viewing time. The first questionnaire is on the Pepsi Max television commercial which uses tennis star Andre Agassi to endorse their product. The advertisement features Agassi doing his 'boring training routine' which is actually bungee jumping from a helicopter over the Grand Canyon. We then see Agassi skidding across the grass of a tennis court after a brilliant shot. Enthusiastic vocal encouragement comes from four young handsome, trendy Pepsi Max drinkers. The umpire declares the ball to be out and Agassi looks up with a quirky grimace and a grass stained mouth. This advertisement uses a celebrity with a reputation of going against the grain. The fact that Agassi nonchalantly brushes off his 'dicing with death training routine' as boring is intended to connect with the world weariness of teenagers who think they've done it all. The umpire puts a dampner on his electrifying brilliance on the court. The intention here is to relate to teenagers who are always being misunderstood and put down by authority. Agassi personifies the mood the makers of Pepsi Max wish to have associated with their product. All of this is reflected in the music, the typeface and the zany camera angles used in the commercial.

The second television commercial is for Levi 501's and is entitled 'Spaceman'. The advertisement has a futuristic feel to it, and is set in a computer generated landscape. A spaceman, human looking with aluminium skin, stands awe-struck watching a spaceship land. A female space woman begins to materialise out of thin air with similar metallic skin but sporting a 'real' pair of dark blue Levi 501's. The spaceman is immediately smitten and watches after her with longing as she turns and walks into the virtual reality landscape. There is no voice-over in the advertisement, just music with a powerful beat, and a mechanical voice saying the lyrics. In a dehumanised, computer generated world, Levi 501 jeans provide the one connection with humanity. The advertisement keys into the computer literacy of today's teenagers. The song from the advertisement, by the band Babylon Zoo subsequently became a hit single.







The commercial, as mentioned in Chapter I (ii), works like a music video. Listening to music and watching videos is listed highly on the activities regularly undertaken by teens. This commercial also uses the age old theme of attraction. The space woman looks fantastic in her jeans and the spaceman knows it and looks on in admiration.

The magazine advertisements chosen were 'Virgin Lips' soft drink and 'Caterpillar Boots'. The magazines listed as most popular in the Y.M.S. had a strong one sex readership so more general readership magazines were chosen. The advertisement for 'Virgin Lips' soft drink is taken from a music magazine called *RAW* (see Appendix A1). The source of the 'Caterpillar Boots' advertisement is a fashionable trendy magazine on Dublin life called *d'Side* (see Appendix A2).

The 'Virgin Lips' advertisement uses sexual innuendo in the words on the can and the copyline of the advertisement. It reads 'Open wide!, virgin lips'. The image on the cans feature pouting lips and a repeated lipstick mark motif. The luminous orange, yellow and green cans pulsate against an electric blue background. All this suggests the flashing light and heavy beat of rave music and hints at possible sexual encounters. The garish colour is attention grabbing but slightly nauseating.

The Caterpillar advertisement features a foreshortened view of a young attractive female. "CATERPILLAR BOOTS LIFE" is the copyline and running across the advertisement are different segments of what life is like once you buy the product. The snippets intend to capture the vigour of the street wise youth who's out there 'living'. Some of the images are blurred, out of focus or from strange angles, capturing the spontaneity of the moment like a camcorder. The woman looks down provocatively, challenging us with her gaze. She's young, beautiful and in control: she's wearing caterpillar boots. Sexual undertones are created by the presence of a female figure. The blatant use of the word 'Life' and the fact that it is in orange signals to teenagers when you buy these boots you are buying into a way of life.





A transition year group of fifty were chosen to complete the questionnaires. Thirty of these have successfully completed art, craft and design for their Junior Certificate. This means they will have had direct experience in using support studies and working through the design process referred to earlier. The remaining twenty have had no art education. The students are aged approximately sixteen years old and are pupils of Newpark Comprehensive School in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. The students, both male and female, come from a variety of social and religious backgrounds. There is a laissez faire atmosphere in the school and students do not wear a uniform. As a result, it has been observed that they are generally more image conscious and street wise than their contemporaries in fee paying schools or in rural areas.

Regarding the questionnaires, it was initially important that the length of exposure to television and magazine advertising and the spending power of this specific group were established. The next step monitored their awareness of advertisements and their critical opinion of them. Finally, the crucial section of the questionnaires centred on whether or not the product was purchased as a result of the advertisement. The students were shown videotapes and pictures of the advertisements and then asked to fill out the appropriate questionnaires. They were given a range of answers and had to tick the box most relevant to them. For the purpose of analysis the questionnaires can be broken down into three sections - exposure, reaction and effect. With regard to the hypothesis being proven, the reaction and effect questions are the ones most closely related to visual literacy. A difference in the answers of the art, design and craft students as opposed to the non art students is anticipated here.

### **Exposure**

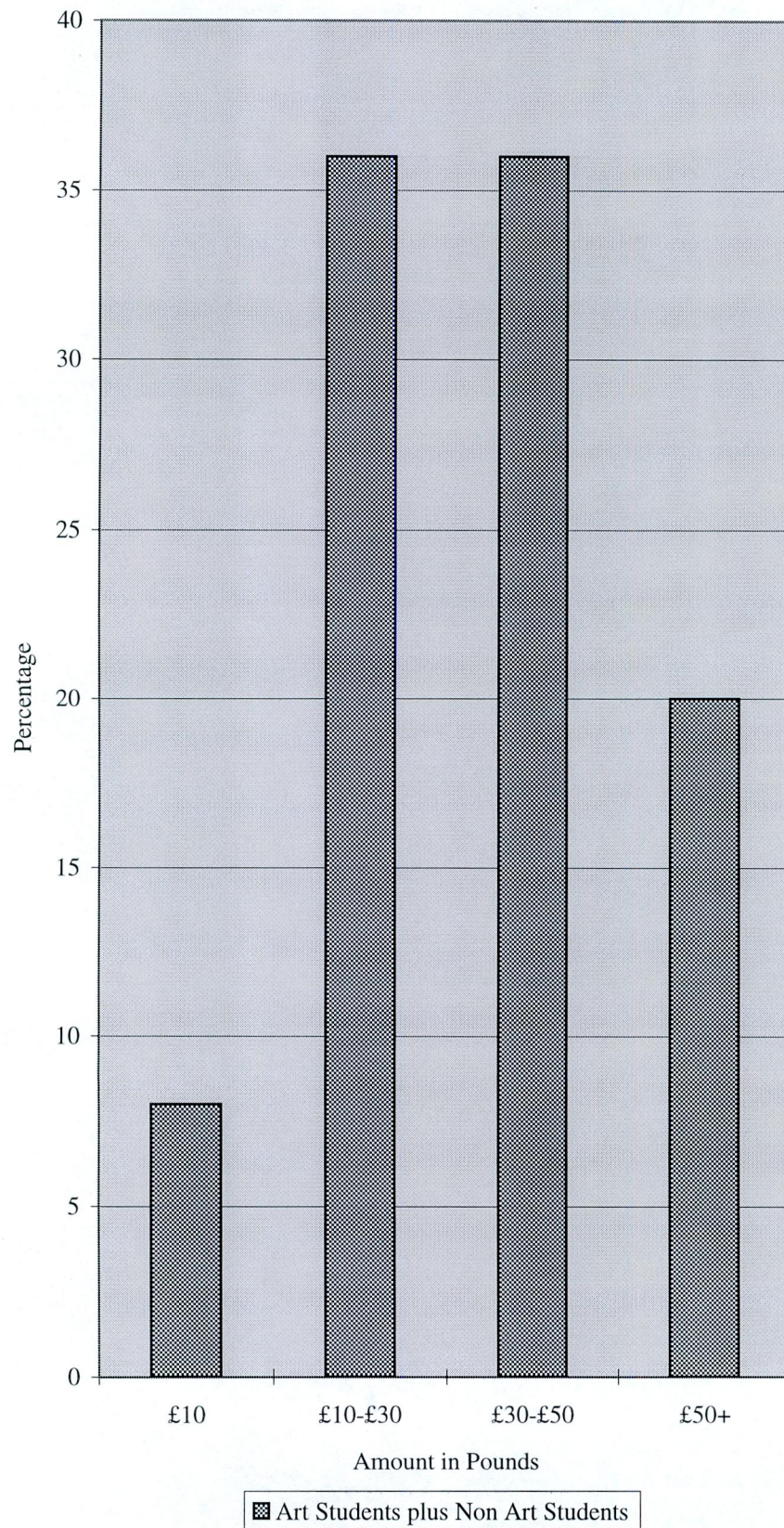
From Table 3.1, analysing the spending power of the group, we can see that there is quite a variety of results. The majority have between £10 and £50 to spend. The variation in spending reflects the mix in social backgrounds. However, this table offers







**Table 3.1 Spending Power**

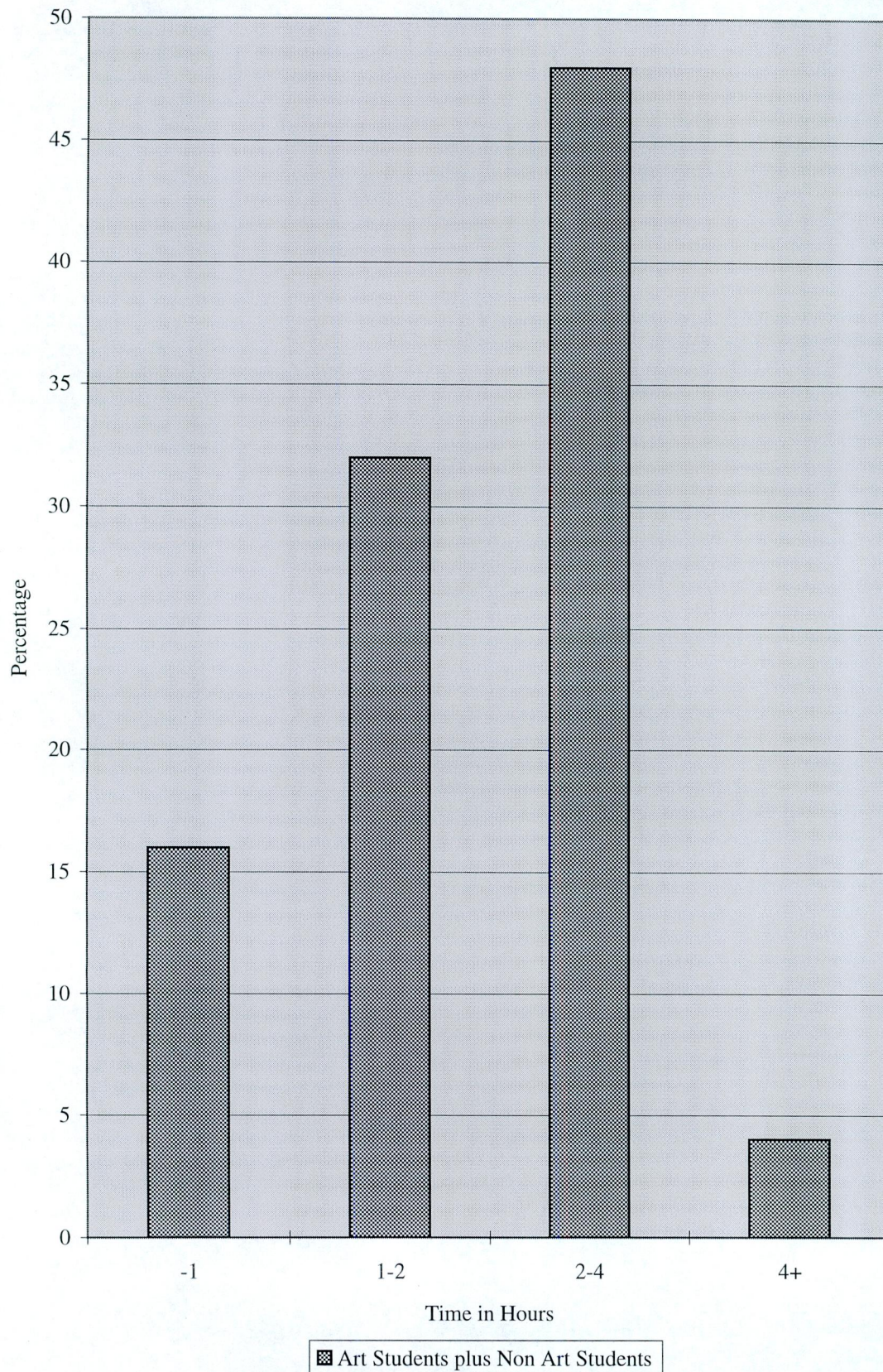








**Table 3.2 Hours Spent Watching Television**

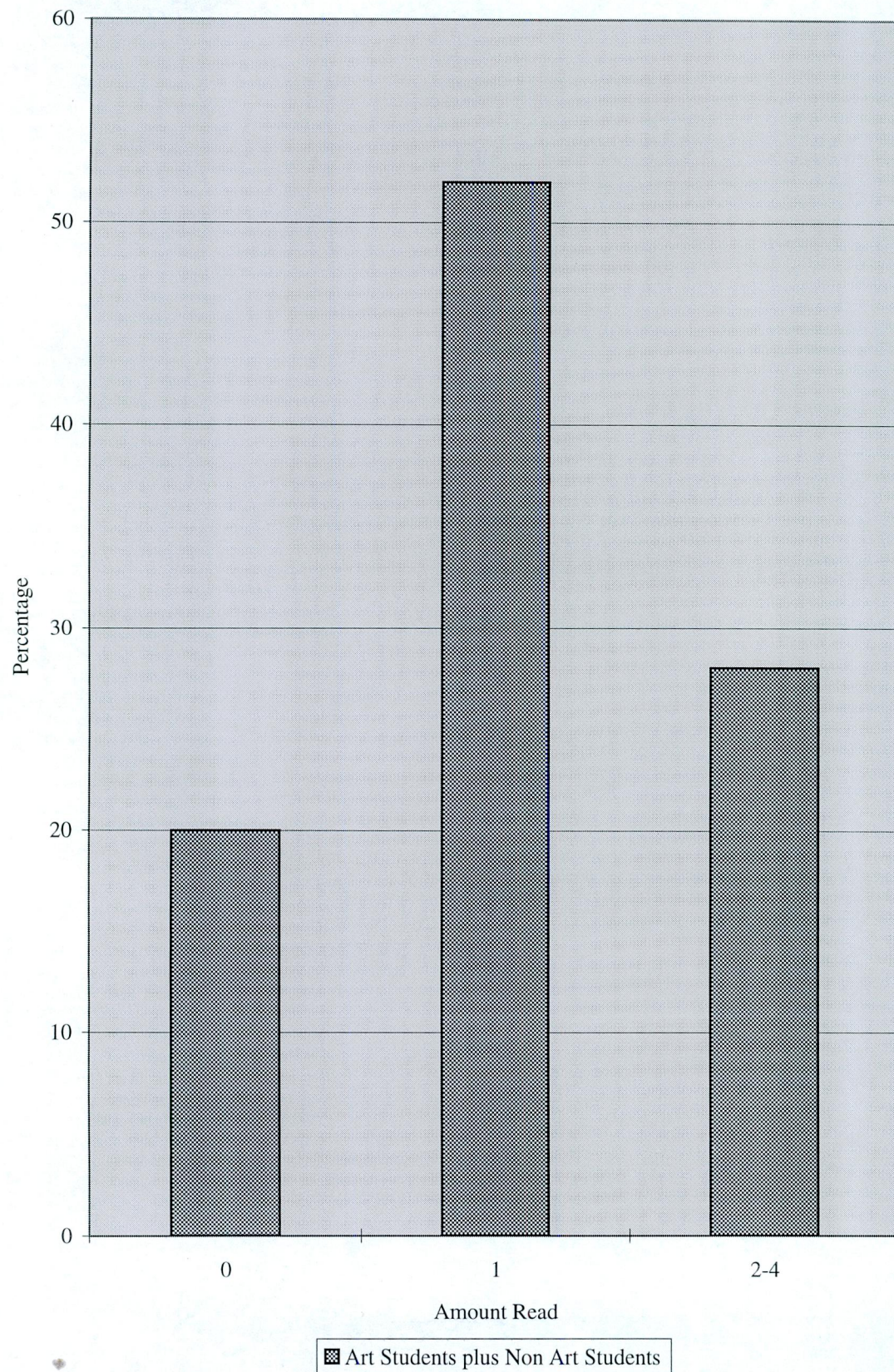








**Table 3.3 Magazines Read Per Week**

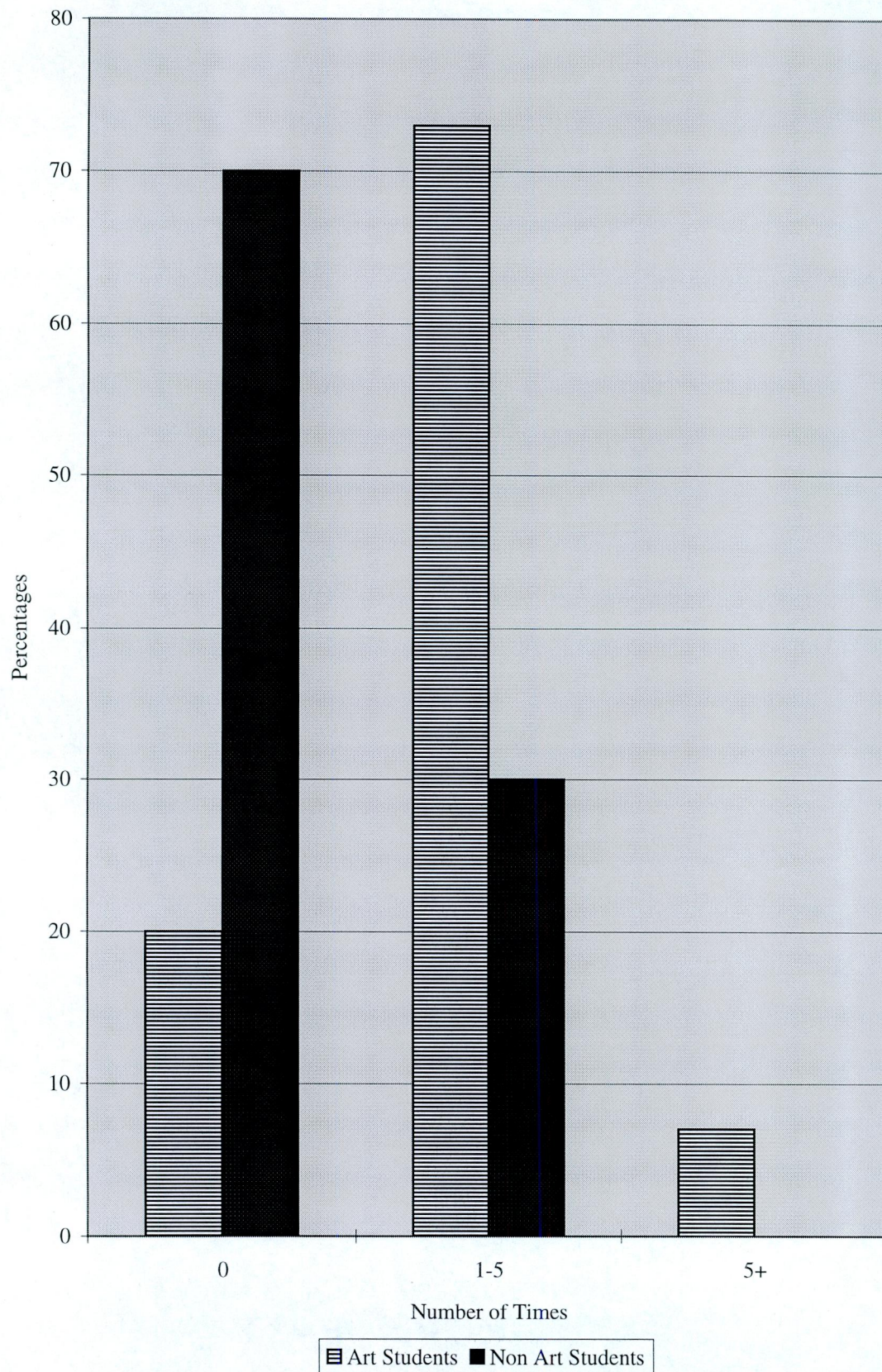








**Table 3.4 Advertisements Cut from Magazines**









**Table 3.5 Exposure to Pepsi Max Commercial**

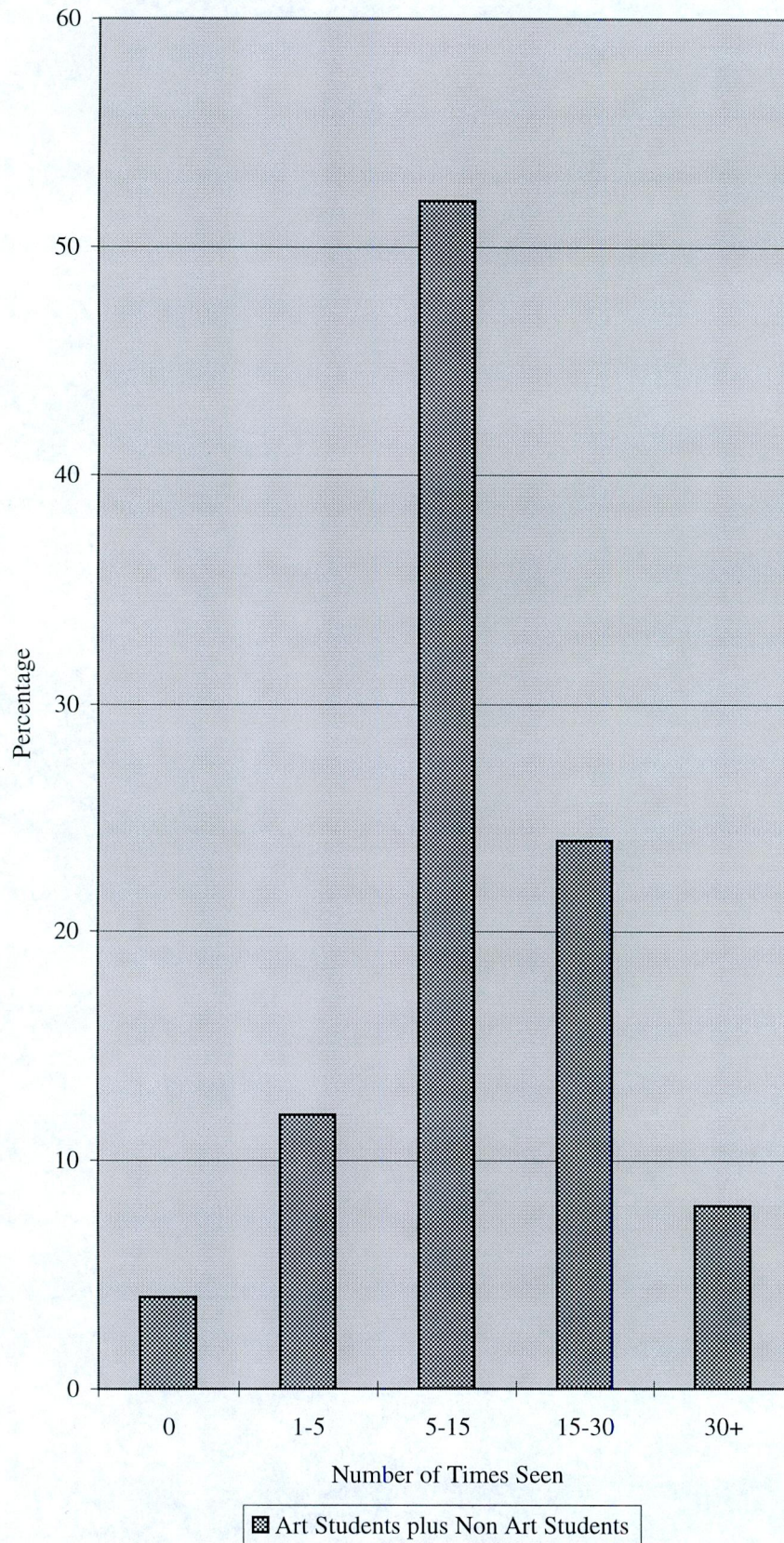
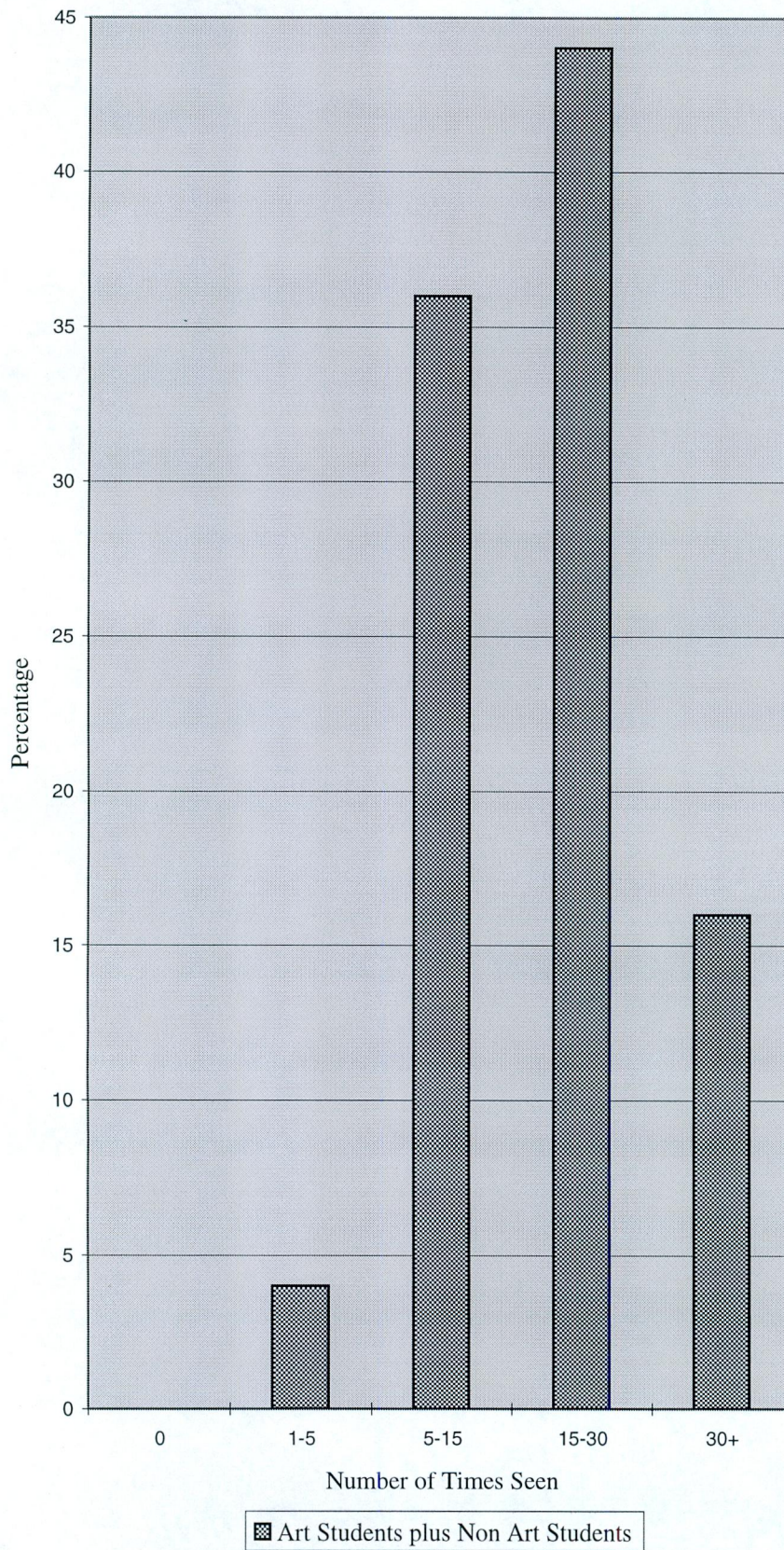








Table 3.6 Exposure to Levi 501 Commercial







us a closer picture of the group we're dealing with than the more general Youth Market Survey. The results of Table 3.2 relate to the hours spent watching television per day. 48% of the students watch between two and four hours of television, and 32% watch between one and two hours with the remaining percentage at either extremes. It is interesting to note, recalling the research discussed in Chapter I (ii) that brought about the Levi 501 'Washroom' commercial, that slightly more than 52% opted for it as their current favourite television advertisement. The Pepsi Max and Nike advertisements came in as second most popular with 8% choosing each and the remainder were mixed.

Table 3.3 shows the current magazines read or flicked through per week. Again the results vary. Slightly over half the students surveyed say they read one magazine per week. 28% read between two and four but as many as 20% read none. Again this may depend on the differences in social background. Students were asked if they ever cut out an advertisement from a magazine to put on their wall or folder. This was to establish their level of awareness with regard to advertising and whether or not they were impressed by the images. Looking at Table 3.4 we can see the marked difference between the two categories. 73% of art and design students claim they cut out magazine advertisements and 70% of non art students claim they never have. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 show the number of times the students have been exposed to the television commercials. Looking at the tables we can see both advertisements have had quite a high exposure rate. The majority have seen the commercials more than five times, with some seeing them as many as thirty times or more.

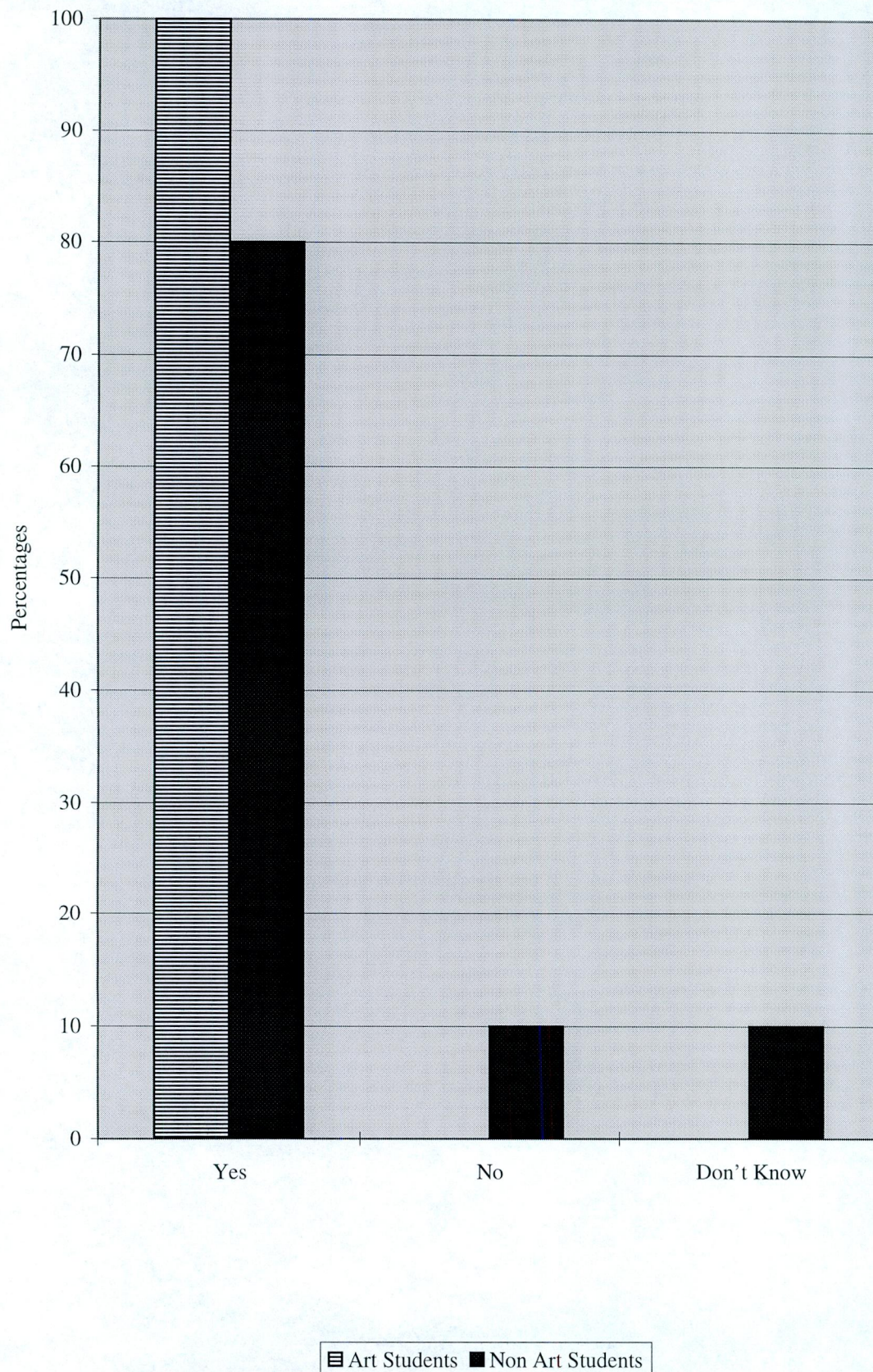
In contrast, exposure to the magazine advertisements was not nearly so high. 81% of the students have never seen the 'Virgin Lips' advertisement before. This is no surprise as it is a new drink on the market and was chosen because of this. 80% have never seen the 'Caterpillar Boots' advertisement before. This does not make their subsequent answers less valid, but the responses elicited will be more spontaneous.







**Table 3.7 Did they like the Advertisement ?  
(Pepsi Max)**

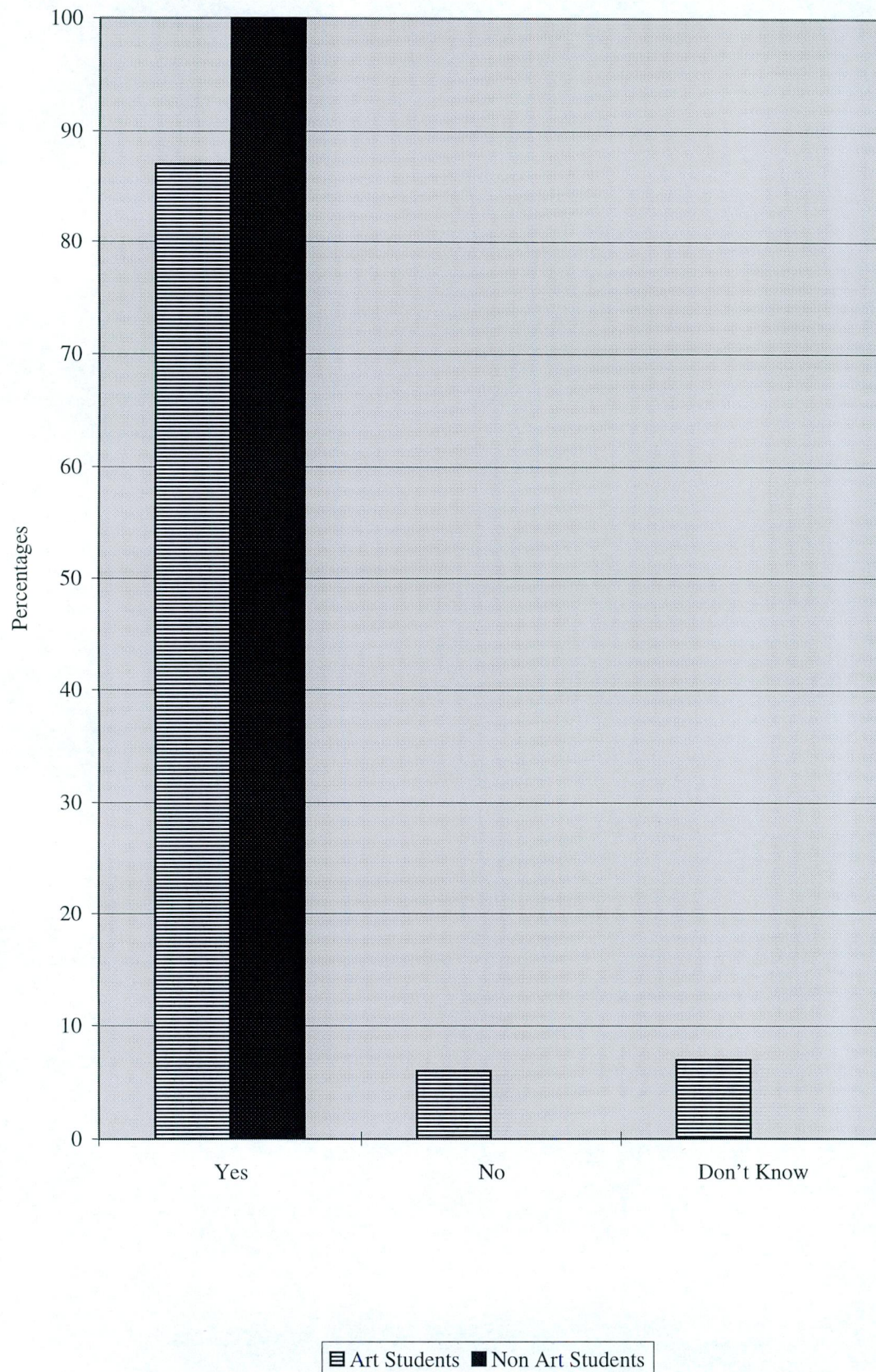








**Table 3.8 Did they like the Advertisement ?  
(Levi 501s)**

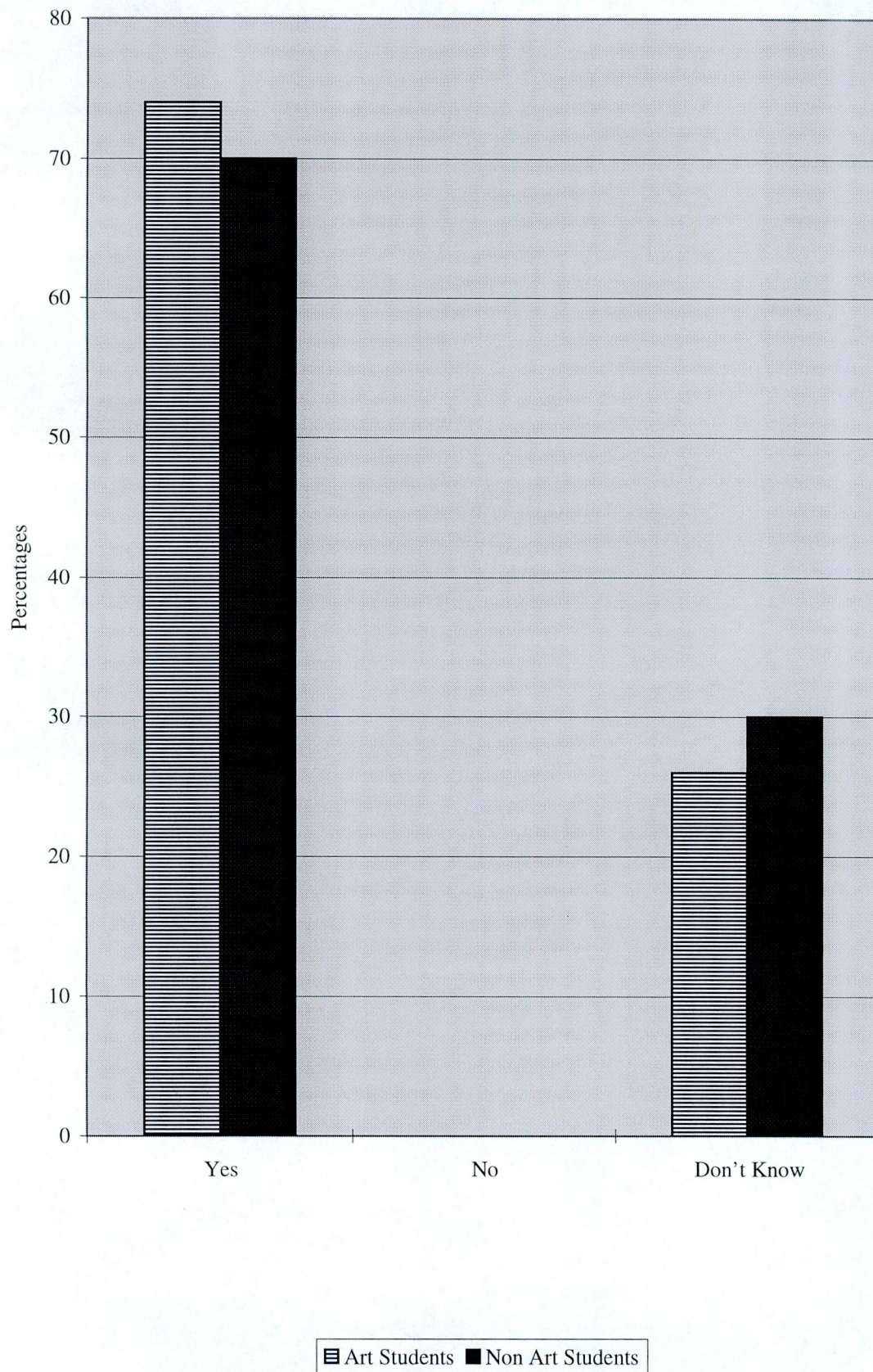








**Table 3.9 Success of the Advertisement  
(Pepsi Max)**

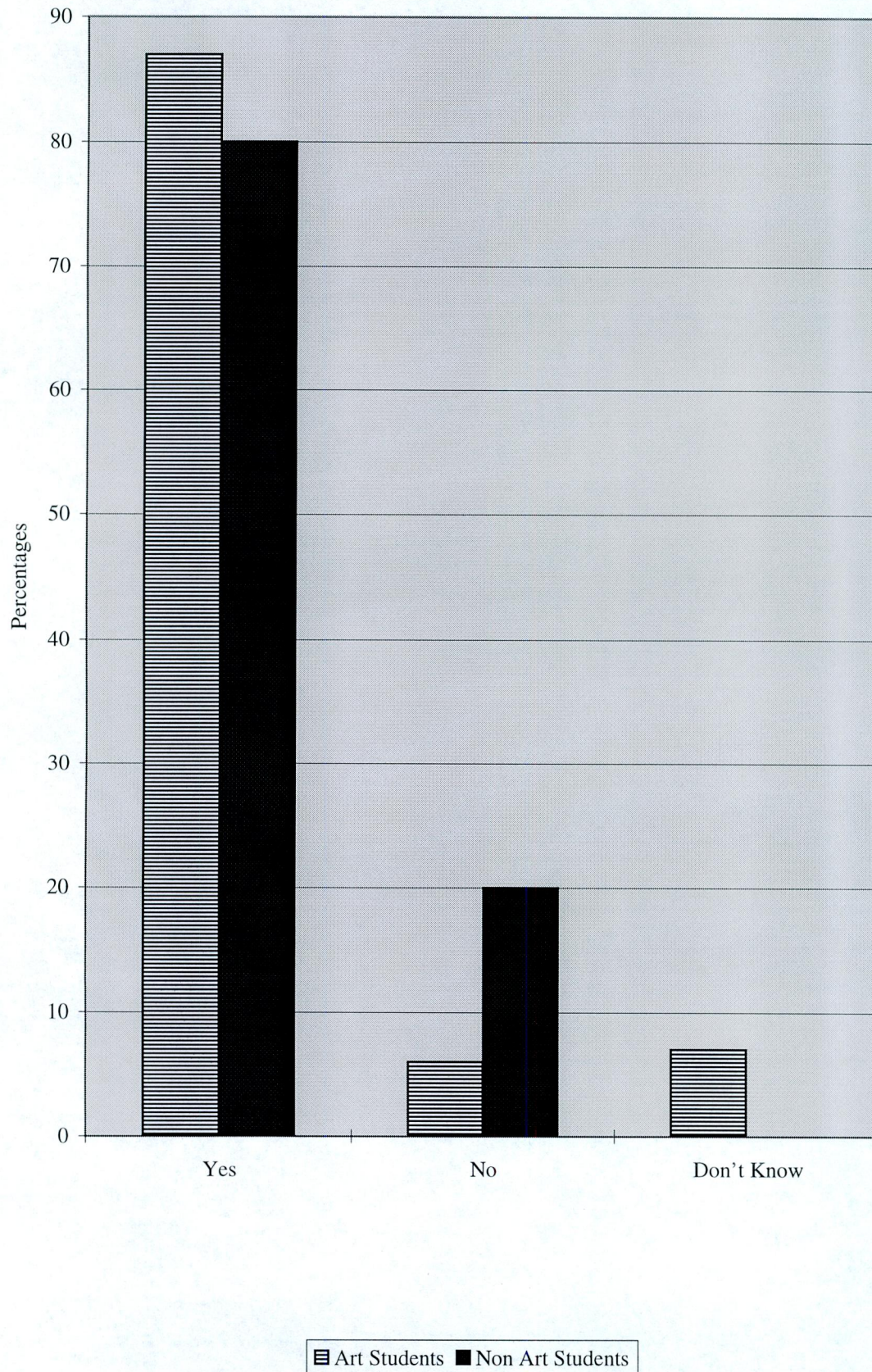








**Table 3.10 Success of the Advertisement  
(Levi 501s)**

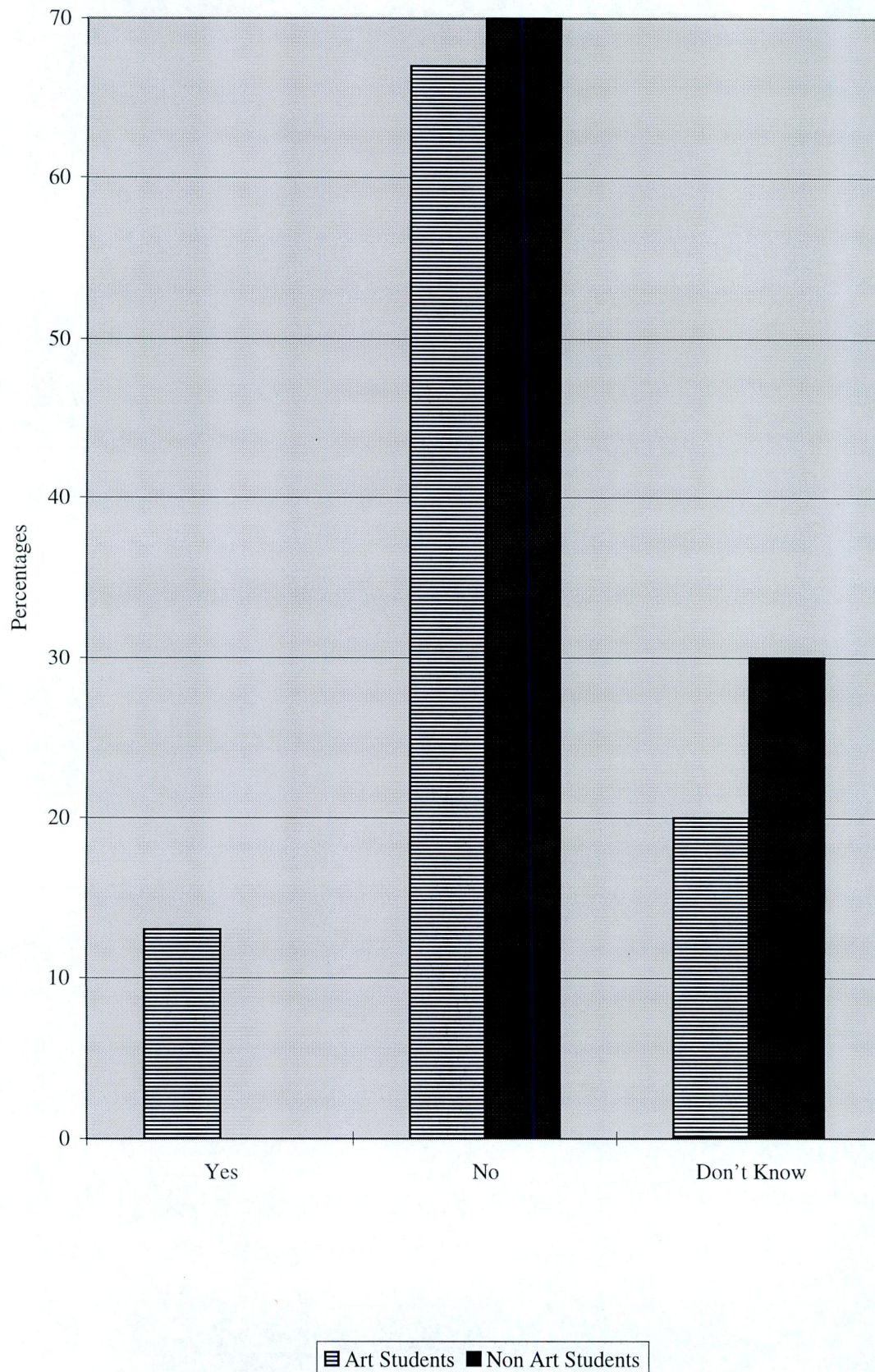








**Table 3.11 Did they like the Advertisement ?  
(Virgin Lips)**

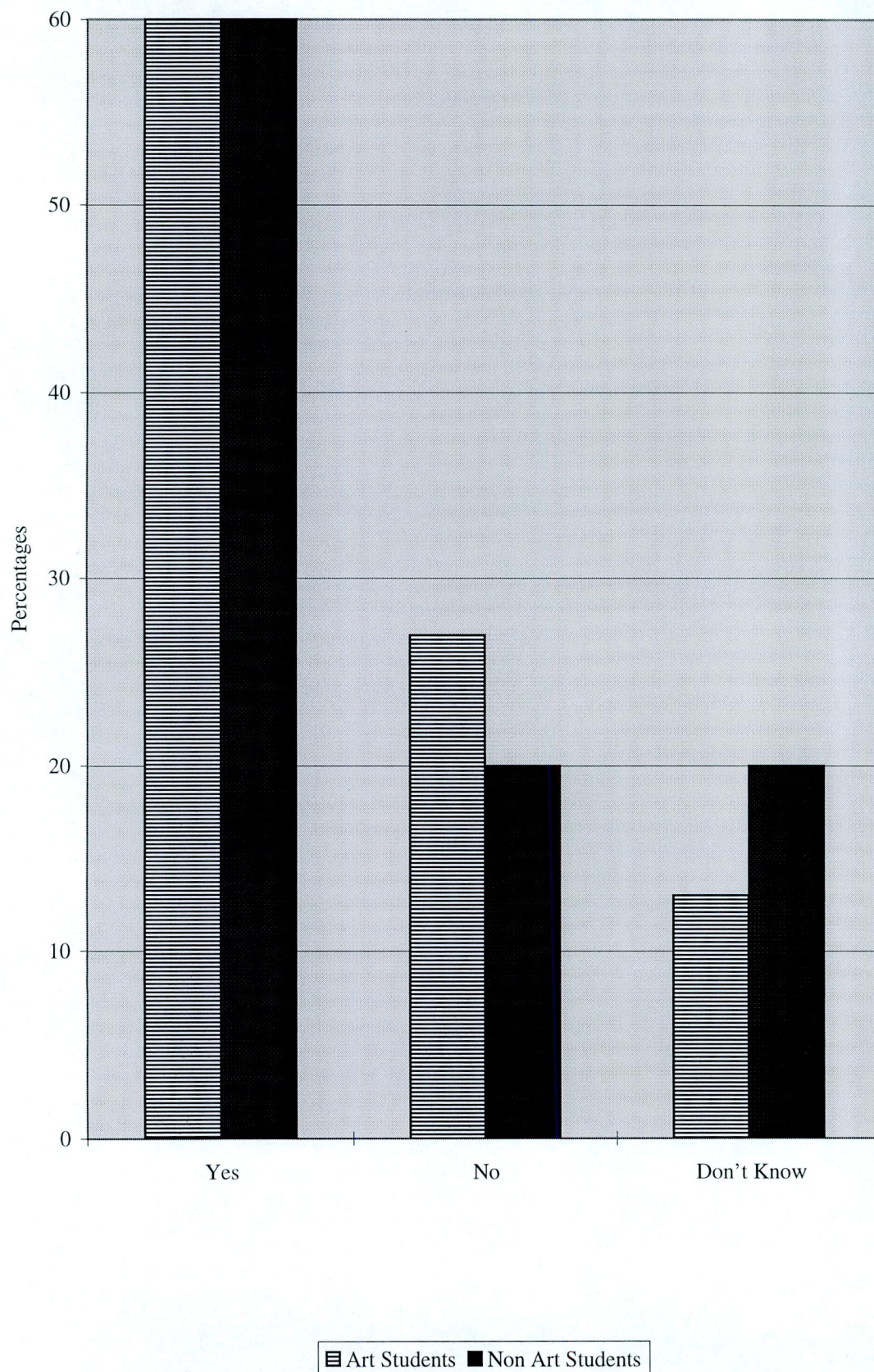








**Table 3.12 Did they like the Advertisement ?  
(Caterpillar Boots)**

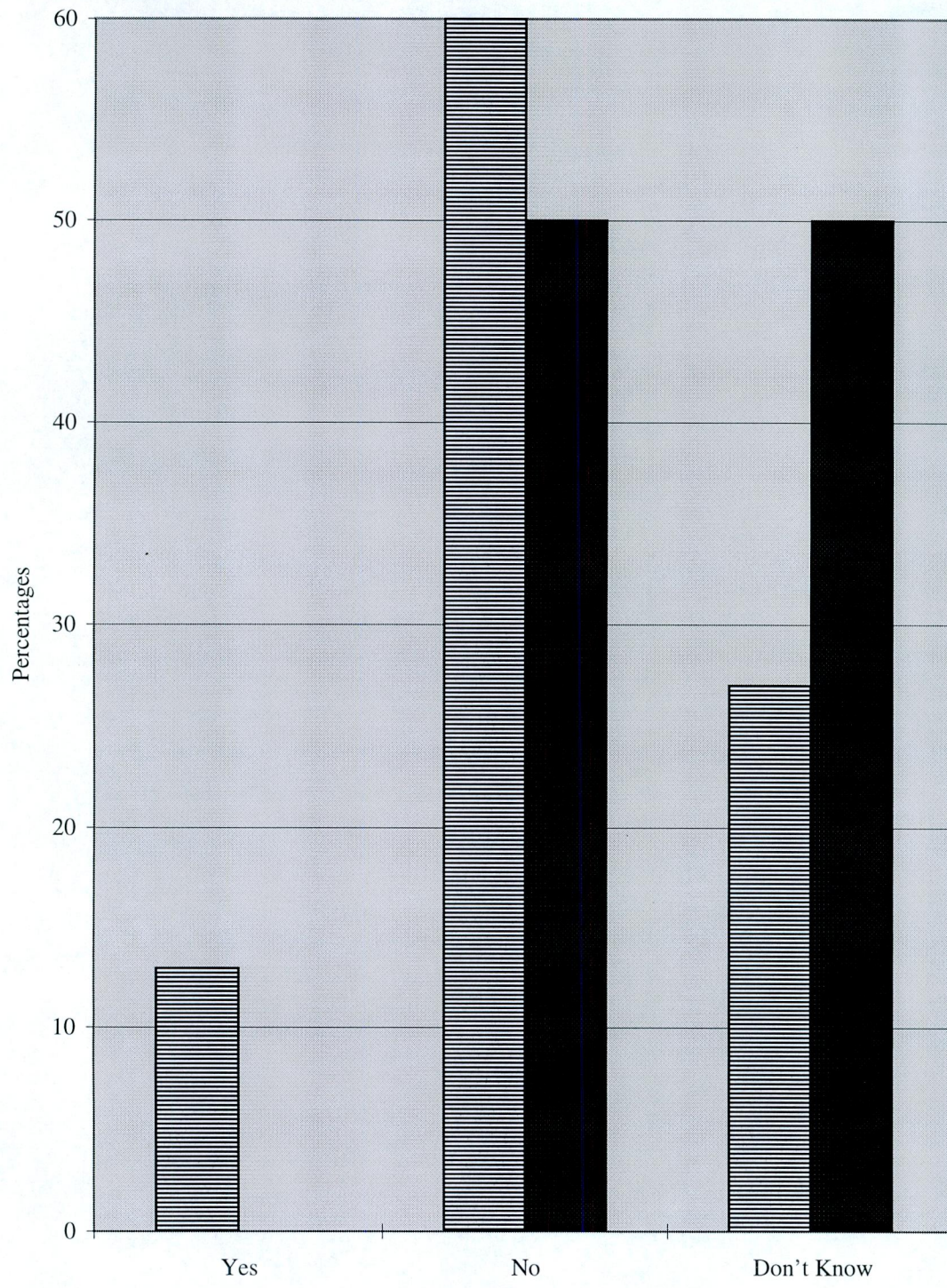








**Table 3.13 Success of the Advertisement  
(Virgin Lips)**



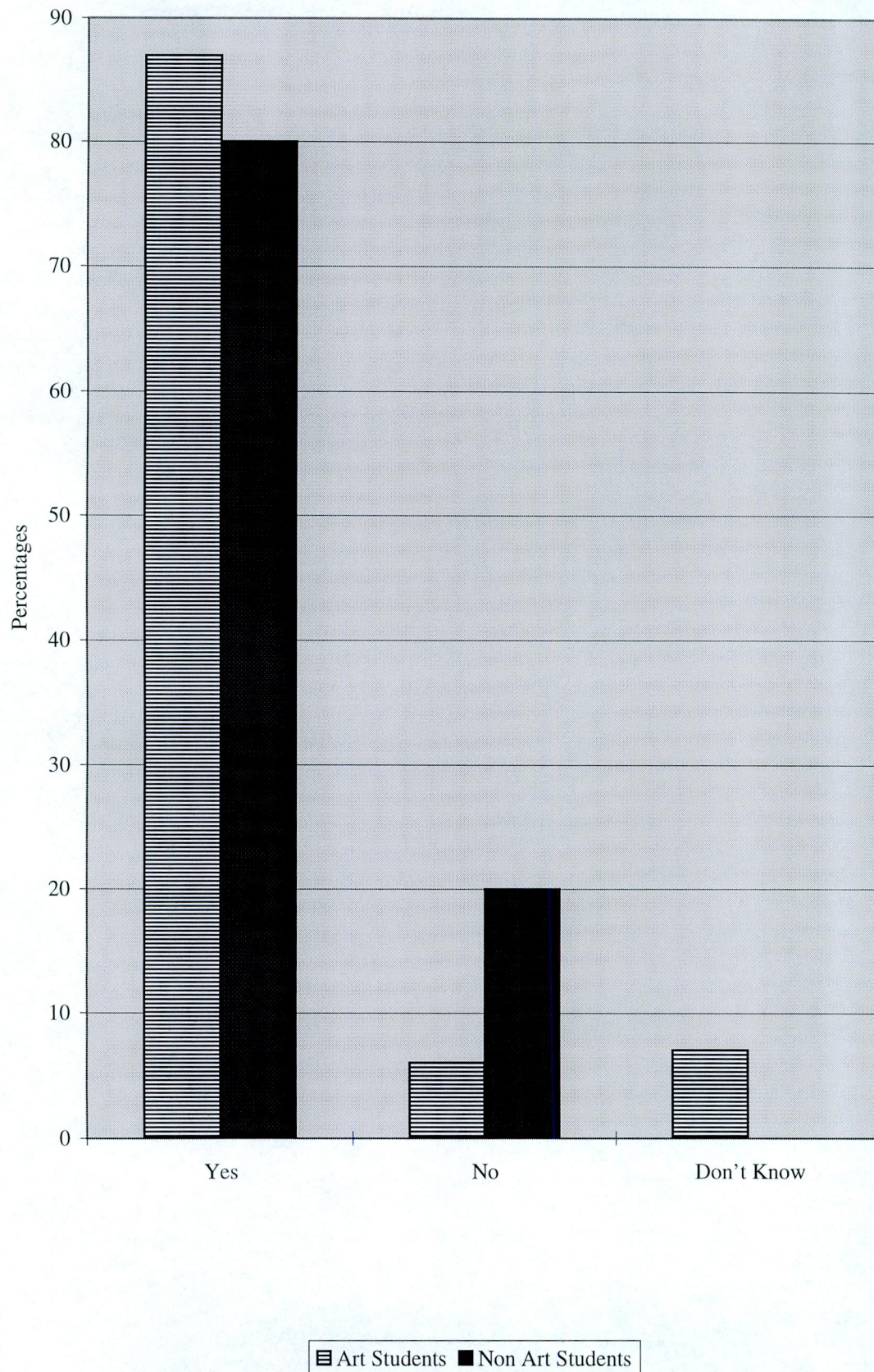
Art Students Non Art Students







**Table 3.14 Success of the Advertisement  
(Caterpillar Boots)**

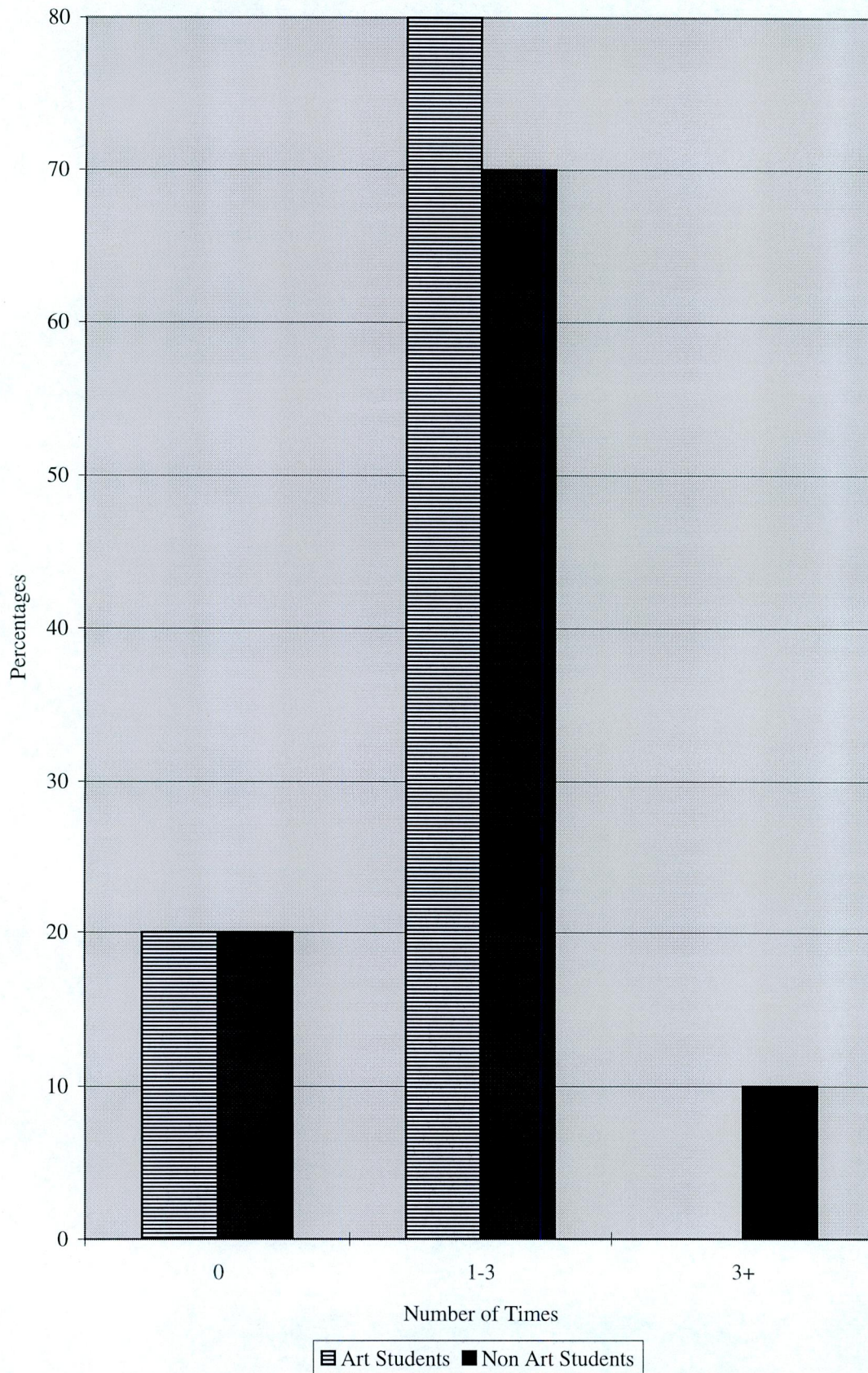








**Table 3.15 Have you ever bought anything because the advertisement first impressed you ?**

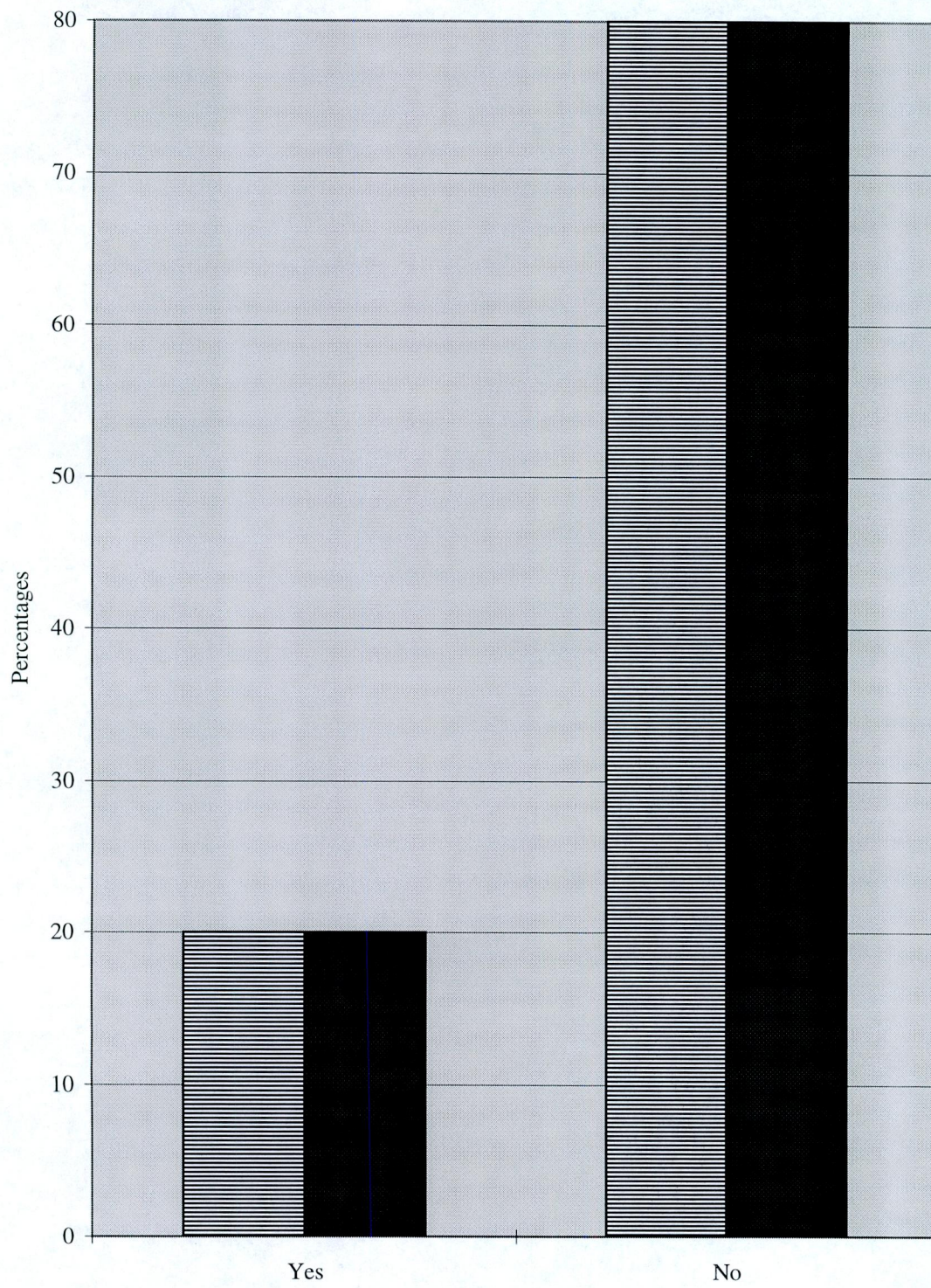








**Table 3.16 Would you buy Pepsi Max as a result of the Advertisement ?**



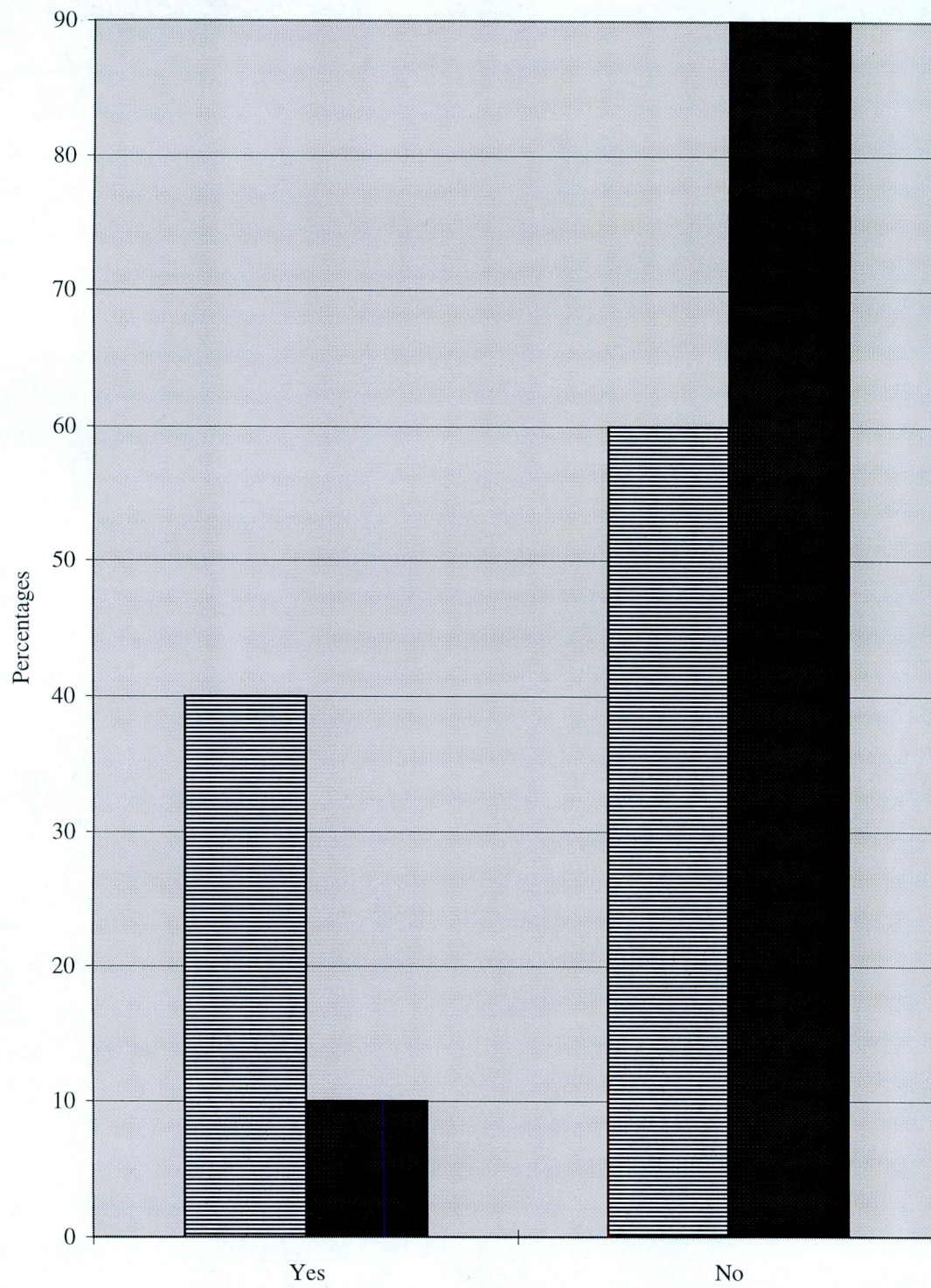
Art Students Non Art Students







**Table 3.17 Would you buy Levi 501s as a result of the Advertisement ?**



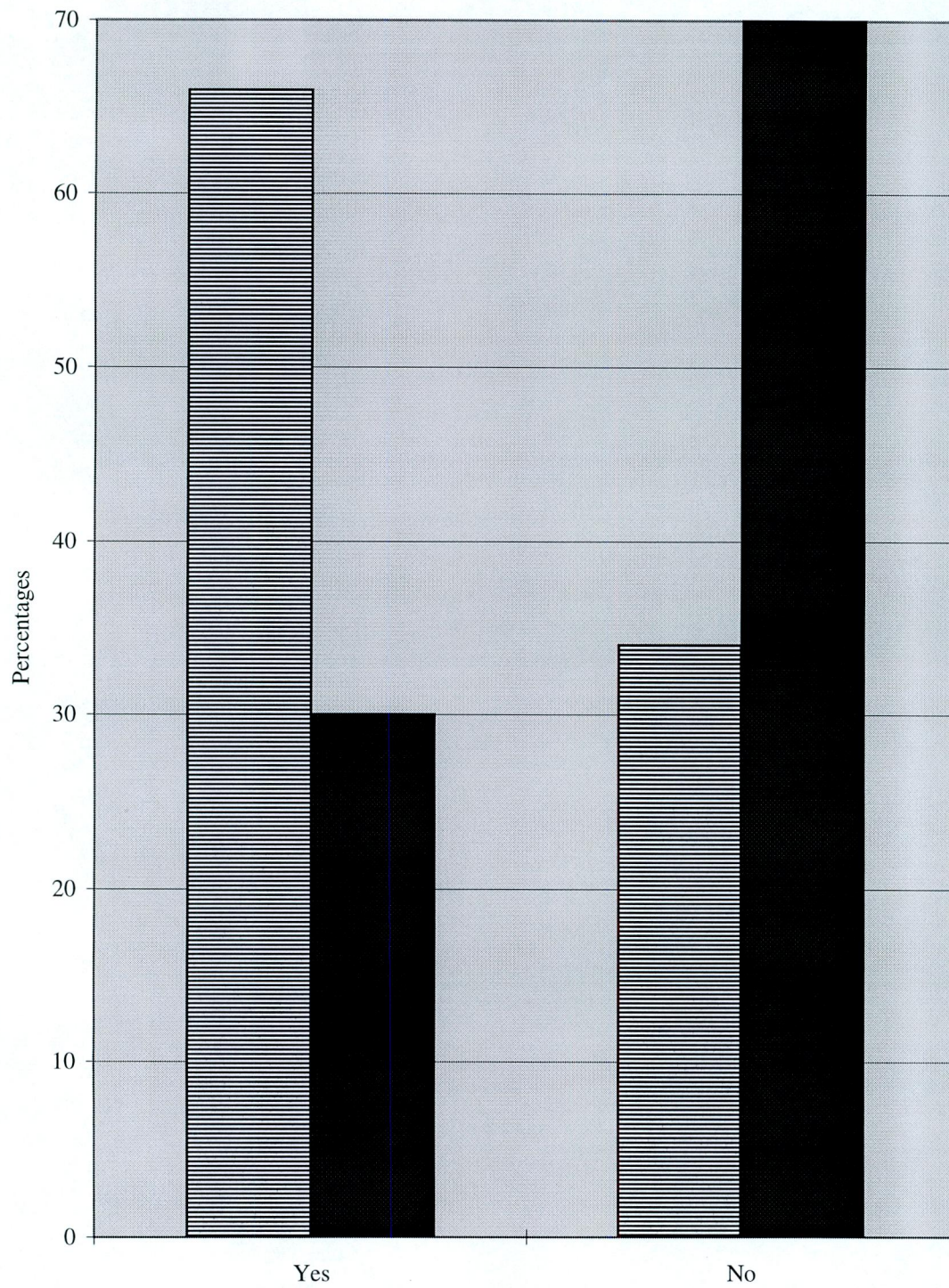
▨ Art Students ■ Non Art Students







**Table 3.18 Would you buy the single 'Spaceman' as a result of the Advertisement ?**



▨ Art Students ■ Non Art Students







## Reaction

Reactions were very favourable towards the television commercials (see Tables 3.7 and 3.8). 100% of the art and design students liked the Pepsi Max advertisement and 100% of the non art students liked the Levi 501 advertisement. Tables 3.9 and 3.10 display their opinions on the success of the advertisements. The majority of students consider the Levi 501 advertisement to be successful although as many as 20% of non art students disagree.

Again the magazine advertisements did not prove as popular. Only 13% of art students liked the 'Virgin Lips' advertisement and thought it was successful (see Tables 3.11 and 3.13). The majority didn't like it or think it was successful. 50% of non art students didn't know whether it was successful or not. In contrast 60% of all surveyed liked the 'Caterpillar Boots' advertisement and more than 80% considered it successful (see Tables 3.12 and 3.14).

## Effect

Students were asked if they had ever bought anything because an advertisement first impressed them. The results are shown in Table 3.15. 20% of both categories say never. However, 80% of art students and 70% of non art students admit to purchasing as a result of advertisements, between one and three times. The remaining 10% of non art students say they have, more than three times.

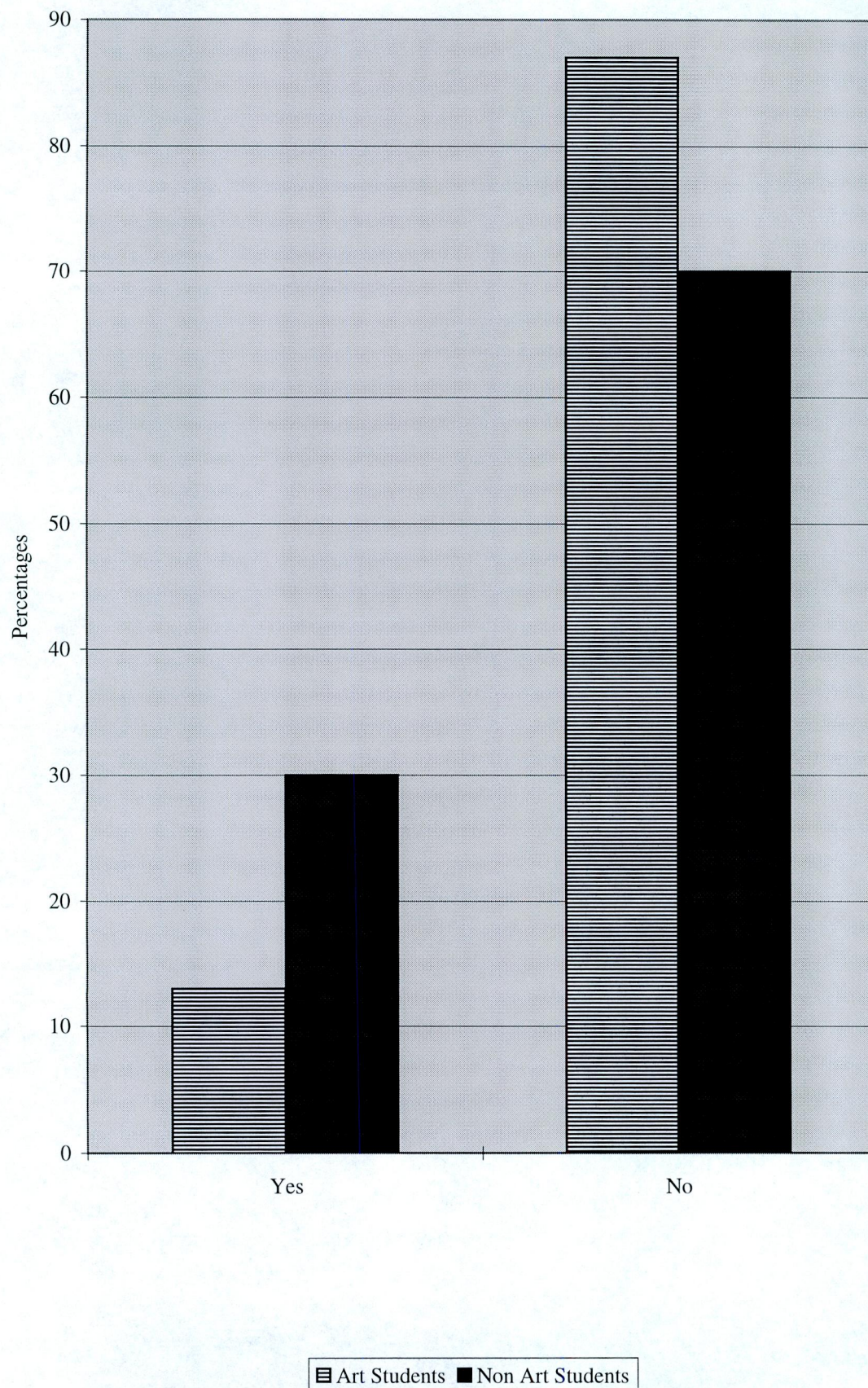
Focusing on the specific advertisements, Table 3.16 tells us that 20% from each category would buy Pepsi Max after seeing the commercial, and 80% of each wouldn't. The effect of the Levi 501 advertisement was a little more erratic. 40% of art and design students would buy the product compared to a low 10% of non art students. An extremely high 90% of non art students said they would not buy the product as a result of seeing the commercial (see Table 3.17). Table 3.18 shows the







**Table 3.19 Would you buy Virgin Lips as a result of the Advertisement ?**

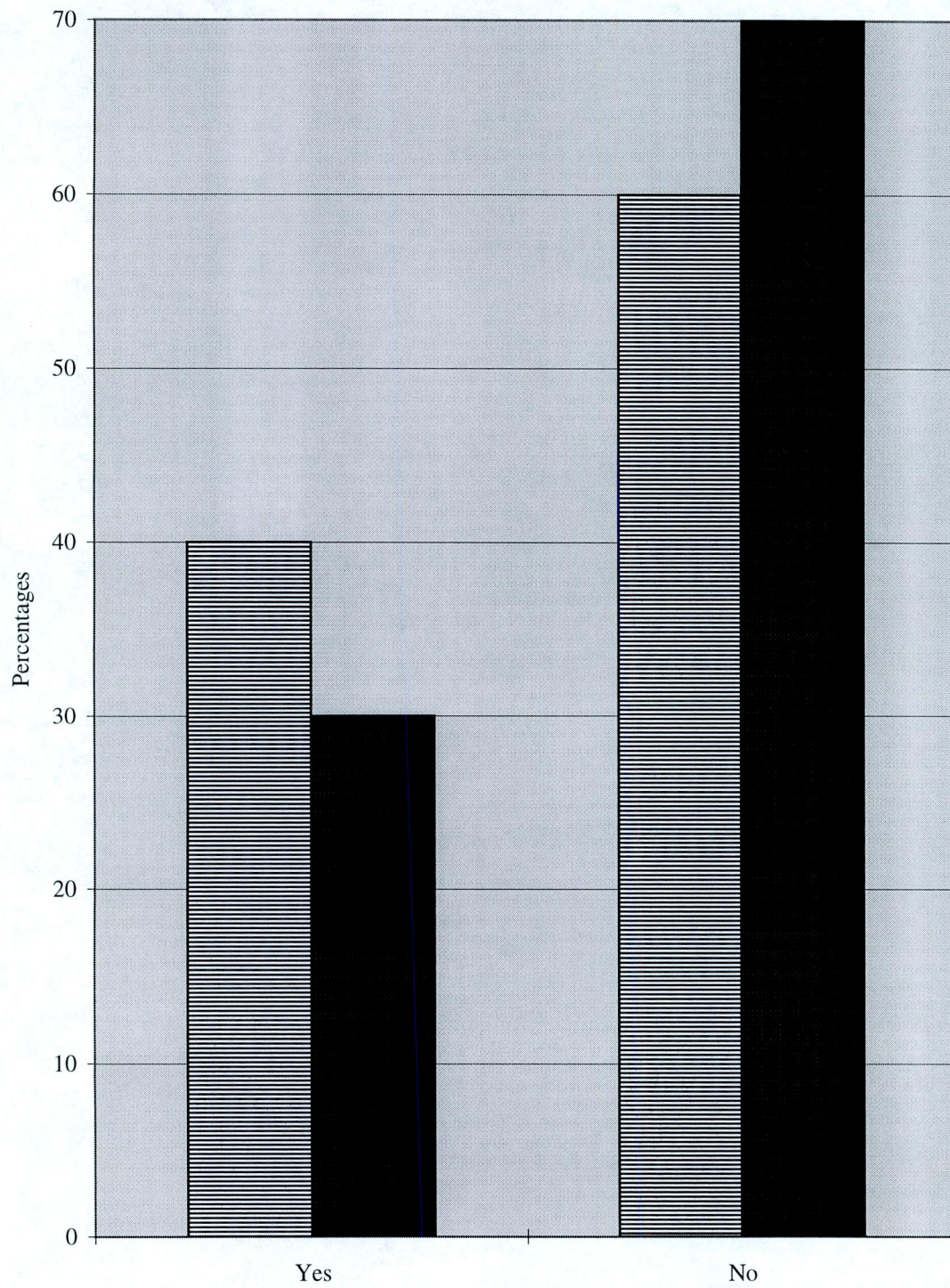








**Table 3.20 Would you buy Caterpillar Boots as a result of the Advertisement ?**



Art Students Non Art Students







percentage of students who would buy the single 'Spaceman' as a result of the commercial. 65% of art students said they would compared with only 30% of non art students.

Again, the magazine advertisements were not as effective (see Tables 3.19 and 3.20). The survey reported that only 13% of art students and 30% of non art students would buy the drink 'Virgin Lips' as a result of seeing the advertisement. 40% of art students and 30% of non art students said they would buy the clothes/boots from the Caterpillar range after seeing the advertisement.

Of the fifty transition years surveyed, most have considerable spending power, apart from 8% with £10 a month at their disposal. They all watch television and most were extremely familiar with the commercials chosen for the questionnaire, so it can be concluded that their exposure to television advertisements is considerable. 80% of the students surveyed frequently read or flicked through magazines, but only 18% had seen the questionnaire advertisements before. Therefore, it is fair to say that the levels of exposure to picture advertising is not as high as television.

Looking at the overall picture there appears to be little difference between the answers of the two groups. On average, over the four advertisements, 65% of art and design students liked the advertisements and 65¼% thought them successful. Of the non art students, 60% liked the advertisements and 57½% thought them successful. The overall average effects, whether or not they would buy the product as a result of the advertisement, is as follows: 28¼% of art students, compared with 20½% of non art students said they would. Quite a contrast in results were evident in the indirect effects question relating to the Levi 501 advertisement. 66% of art students, compared with 30% of non art students said they would buy the single 'Spaceman' as a result of hearing it on the advertisement. From these results it appears that the opposite of what the hypothesis was to prove is true, that those with an art education cannot read







advertisements better than those without an art education: they are not more visually literate.

However, on closer examination another picture emerges. The students were asked if they had ever cut out an advertisement to put on their wall or on their folder cover. 73% of art students said they had, between one and five times, compared with 30% of non art and design students (see Table 3.4). The purpose of this questionnaire was to establish levels of visual awareness, whether or not advertisements were noticed. As stated previously in this dissertation, an education in art and design aims to promote visual awareness, which is the precursor of visual literacy. On the basis of this question it could be concluded that the art and design students are substantially more visually aware than their counterparts. They are conscious of images and show an ability to critically evaluate and respond to them. If they like the image sufficiently they will cut it out and display it.

The information presented to us in the tables support this view. The art students also appear to be marginally more decisive in their answers. Taking the average percentage over the four advertisements, 15% of non art students compared with 10% of art students didn't know whether they liked the advertisement or not. Similarly 20% of non art students compared with 16% of art students couldn't decide whether they thought the advertisement was successful or not. It could be argued that the greater ability to critically evaluate images, demonstrated in the increased decisiveness of the art student, relates back to their art education. They have had direct experience of image making and manipulation, knowledge of the art elements and the support studies section of the curriculum so they now have the confidence to give an educated opinion on advertisements.

To support this argument, inconsistency creeps into the answering of the non art students. If a large percentage of the students liked the advertisement and thought it was successful then the pattern evident from the questionnaire was that a certain







percentage of them would buy the product. Referring to Tables 3.11 and 3.13, none of the non art students liked the 'Virgin Lips' advertisement or thought it to be successful, yet curiously 30% said they would buy the product as a result of seeing the advertisement (see Table 3.19). In contrast art students answer consistently. 13% like the advertisement, thought it successful and would buy the product as a result. It could be suggested that this is due to the lesser ability of the non art students to critically evaluate images.

There is evidence, then, from the results, to support the view that art students are more visually aware and potentially more visually literate than the non art educated. However, this does not seem to translate into their responses to advertising. It appears that they are more, not less susceptible to being duped by advertisements than the non art students. This is not in keeping with the arguments built up throughout this dissertation. However, as stated earlier in this chapter this is intended only as an exploration of ideas. Also, it is important to realise that 'post-sell' research, although simple and scientifically controllable, can be limited. To recall information outlined in Chapter I (ii), the effects of advertising on people are complicated by a number of factors and people do not always reveal their responses to advertisements under interrogation from a sociologist. Teenagers are prone to peer group pressure and dislike being different from each other. This could account for the similarity in answering across the board. Perhaps if a similar questionnaire were to be carried out in four years time, when they have matured, the results would be different.

On a positive note, it is important to point out that these students have not yet advanced far in their art education. The history and appreciation of art and design, the area which most strongly promotes visual literacy, is not thoroughly addressed until the Leaving Certificate.







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<sup>1</sup> John A. Michael, *Art and Adolescence, Teaching Art at Secondary Level* (London: Teachers College Press, 1983), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Allison, *Journal of the National Society for Art Education* (Devon: Lecture given at Rolle College, 1978), p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Michael, *Art and Adolescence*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.131.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The Department of Education, *The Junior Certificate Art, Craft and Design Syllabus* (Dublin: Government Publications, 1995), p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Ferguson, "Race, Gender and a Touch of Class", in *Teaching Art and Design - Addressing issues and identifying directions*, ed. Roy Prestice (London: Cassell Education, 1995), p.51.







## CONCLUSION

This dissertation was undertaken to test the hypothesis that art and design students can 'read' advertisements better than those without an art education. In order to understand the growing significance of advertising, it was necessary to trace its development through the centuries. It was established that, as technology advanced, so advertising grew in complexity. By the twentieth century products were being linked with prosperity and social status. It was observed that the advent of television changed the face of advertising. The combination of sound and vision assured the message great force and impact.

In Chapter I (ii) it was indicated that advertisements offer more than just a product, they offer a way of life. The sophistication and persuasive nature of the images conveyed by the media were recognised. They are hard to resist because they offer the chance to obtain perfection. The influence of advertising were found to be very strong, regardless of whether they are believed. Methods of research were discussed and the difficulty in obtaining concrete answers from effects research were acknowledged. It was found that a relationship exists between advertising and the vulnerable members of society. Advertising will not affect a person if that person does not fulfil or gratify a need. It was suggested that modern mass culture, including advertising, attempts to compensate for the deficiencies in a person's life. Here it was decided that teenagers are vulnerable members of the audience and therefore, open to being influenced by advertisements.

In Chapter II, the importance of the media as an educational institution was acknowledged. It was established that the art educator has a responsibility to promote visual literacy in this increasingly visual world. It was recognised that art educators are the only people in schools who are potentially capable of developing perceptual efficiency. After consideration, the validity of advertising as a topic for discussion in







the art classroom was confirmed. This was due to the art elements contained within them and the fact that they communicate visually.

The meaning of the term 'visual literacy' was established in Chapter III. It refers to a heightened visual awareness and an ability to critically evaluate images. Sections of the Junior Certificate art syllabus, relating directly to the promotion of visual literacy were highlighted. A sample of current advertisements from magazine and television, aimed at the teen market were selected. The four questionnaires formulated to monitor student responses to advertising were filled out by the sample group of fifty transition year students. A difference between the answers of the art and design students and the non-art students was anticipated.

It was discovered that, overall, the questionnaires were answered similarly, irrespective of whether or not students had studied art. On closer examination, however, it was established that the art students were more decisive in their answering. Although the hypothesis was not proven to be true, there was evidence which suggested that they are more conscious of images than their counterparts. The other factors, particularly peer pressure, which could influence student answering were referred to. In conclusion, it was deemed significant that the students have yet to study the history and appreciation of art and design. It was established that critical evaluation is an inherent part of this section on the Leaving Certificate art syllabus. This, considered with the healthy state of visual awareness among art students at present, augers well for increased visual literacy in the future.







# Open wide!









# CATERPILLAR BOOTS LIFE



DJ RAP, JUNGLIST

WALKING MACHINES®









## PEPSI MAX TELEVISION COMMERCIAL

1. Did you study art and design for your Junior Certificate?

Yes ☐

No ☐

2. On average how much pocket money would you spend each month?

£10 ☐

£10 - £30 ☐

£30 - £50 ☐

More than £50 ☐

3. Do you watch television?

Less than 1 hour per day ☐

1 - 2 hours per day ☐

2 - 4 hours per day ☐

More than 4 hours per day ☐

4. Have you seen this advertisement before?

Yes ☐

No ☐

5. How many times have you seen it?

1 - 5 times ☐

5 - 15 times ☐

15 - 30 times ☐

30 or more ☐







6. Do you like this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

7. Do you think this advertisement is successful?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

8. What is your favourite television advertisement at the moment?

9. Did/Would you buy fresh Pepsi Max as a result of watching this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐

10. Have you ever bought anything because the advertisement first impressed you?

Never ☐

1 - 3 times ☐

More than 3 times ☐







## LEVI 501s TELEVISION COMMERCIAL

1. Have you seen this advertisement before?

Yes ☐

No ☐

2. How many times have you seen it?

1 - 5 times ☐

5 - 15 times ☐

15 - 30 times ☐

30 or more ☐

3. Do you like this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

4. Do you think this advertisement is successful?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

5. Did/Would you buy Levi Jeans as a result of watching this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐







6. Did/Would you buy the single 'Spaceman' or The Babylon Zoo album as a result of this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐







## VIRGIN LIPS MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENT

1. On average, how many magazines do you read/flick through?

None ☐

1 per week ☐

2 - 4 per week ☐

2. Have you ever cut out an advertisement to put on your wall / on your folder cover?

Never ☐

Between 1 - 5 ☐

More than 5 ☐

3. Have you seen this advertisement before?

Yes ☐

No ☐

4. Do you like this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐

5. Do you think this advertisement is successful?

Yes ☐

No ☐

6. Did/Would you buy 'Virgin Lips' as a result of seeing this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐







## CATERPILLAR BOOTS MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENT

1. Have you seen this advertisement before?

Yes ☐

No ☐

2. Do you like this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐

3. Do you think this advertisement is successful?

Yes ☐

No ☐

4. Did/Would you buy the Caterpillar range of products as a result of seeing this advertisement?

Yes ☐

No ☐







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