

## PERSUASIVE ASPECTS IN FOOD ADVERTISING FOR CHILDREN

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*Abstract: The advertisements are well known for their ability to attract attention. The force of persuasion is able to create a need that did not exist before. This way are born desires to purchase various goods or services, to donate money by buying products for different unknown charities or even to change one's lifestyle. Apparently the advertisements are a type of anticipated socialization, because the customer not only that he knows what he wants to buy, but he also knows how to buy. And as for the children we see a change in the transfer of information between parent and child, because the child becomes the one who shows the parent what and how to buy. In this article I want to highlight some of the persuasive issues that lead children to ask or to want a certain product, although advertisements sometimes do not target products belonging to the children's sphere of interest, such as advertisements for detergent and hygiene products for household use. In order to highlight the persuasive aspects of advertisements I will analyze the most popular advertisements broadcasted on the most watched children channels.*

*Keywords: advertising, children, persuasion, communication, sociology*

Advertising has undoubtedly been used since antiquity. The fact that one of the most common occupations of people in antiquity was trade inevitably leads us to the thought that they somehow made themselves known. Although we consider it a primitive form, advertising began by shouting in markets, so that everyone to find about the objects for sale (Tungate, 2007, 11), this being a form of information about the services or products offered. Today we can notice a modern form of what we called above as primitive advertising. By caravan type cars, which not only that "shout" when will the next fair will take place or what are the offers of certain restaurants or the best man in election campaigns, but they also offer an audio background and colorful and attracting images through the displayed banner. And thus the informational purpose reaches the next level, becoming persuasion.

So we can say that advertising is a means of communication made to influence buyers to purchase goods or services, being impersonal and paid. Advertising aims to attract immediate attention, to determine as quickly as possible a buying decision and to change customers' attitudes. It transmits information and uses various means to convince consumers to buy. The main goal is the short-term trading (Kotler, 1999, 793).

Advertising is one of the components of marketing, with a versatile use. It proves to be effective from the launch of a product or service to the customer's loyalty and product repositioning, highlighting other qualities. Advertising can also be presented in various forms (written, audio, video or combinations thereof), using various channels (television, internet, radio,

press). Television advertising has issued a significant number of advantages, such as ease of repetition, low cost per person, impersonality and better appreciation for the advertised products (Prutianu *et al.*, 1998, p. 187). According to the studies, advertising through the audiovisual channel is still the top choice of advertisers. So from year to year advertising costs increase. The Global Advertising Revenue Forecast Spring Update study, conducted by Magna Global, exposed the media advertising revenue in the last three years. It showed that the revenue has increased by 3.2 percent in 2014 compared to 2013, reaching to 3.9 percent in 2015 and to 5.4 percent in 2016, representing 480 billion dollars. In this business, advertisement is the most popular form of promotion through the broadcasting channels. And one of the most used and successful channels is the audiovisual medium, occupying 36 percent of all global distribution channels. Today television is marked by an increase of 4.4 percent, meaning 179 billion dollars in 2016, the biggest increase in the last 4 years (Magna Global Survey 2016, 2-3). According to the study Media Consumption Forecasts 2015, conducted by ZenithOptimedia, television is worldwide the most attractive media with 183.9 minutes of use per day (2014), followed by internet with 109.5 minutes per day. According to the forecasts for 2017, television will remain on the first place (Media Consumption Forecasts 2015, 4)

Television has remained an effective means for transmitting the advertising, being undoubtedly a means of information. With many advantages, television advertising comprises a large number of viewers. In 2009, the number of households equipped with color TV was at 94% of the population (96% of urban inhabitants and 92% of rural residents – CENG study, 2009, 12). Another advantage is that audiovisual advertising cannot be restricted like the advertising in online or on mobile phones and the access to this information channel is easy. Therefore, the publicity offered through this medium uses an invasive method, because the child or the adult cannot choose what advertisements are aired on his TV. It is true that both children and adults are not forced to active listening to each advertisement because they can change from a TV station to another or even to shut down the device or leave the room where the TV is. But when children or adults are watching a favorite show, advertisements frequently appear during the show. For children it is a more delicate situation because they are sometimes attracted by advertisements more than the cartoon. If the online advertising can be restricted by installing a simple program, the advertising page in newspapers and magazines can be skipped, when it comes to television, the only restriction is limiting the children's viewing time. But this limit does not protect the child from advertising (Bansal, 2010, 17)

But why should we protect the child from advertising? Apparently advertising shows only some information for several minutes. But doubts about this information comes from the way that it is transmitted. If advertising is a means of presenting what's new is not a problem, but it becomes one when it uses sentimental exploitation or takes advantage of a child innocence and inability to understand the reality of the message. That is why advertising is seen as detrimental to the interests and welfare of children. And most times the advertisement is not realized for a particular product but for a particular brand that produces a particular product. One study found that brand recognition begins at the age of 2 and increases with age and the ability of recognition. And more than that, the same study found that the children's exposure to advertising offered by television is one of the

means with the greatest influence through which children learn to recognize and remember the promoted brand (Valkenburg, Buijzen, 2005, 463-465). Another study found that children have the greatest influence on the purchases of relevant items for themselves (e.g. cereals, toys, clothes), a moderate degree of influence for the family activities (vacations, restaurants) and the less influence regarding the purchases of long-use goods and expensive objects (Tufté, 2004, 71).

### **What is the actual message of advertising?**

A simple analysis can easily show that advertising gives us information in order to transform us either in short-term customers, either in loyal customers for the product or the brand. In other words, advertising aims at attracting attention and stimulating the interest in the purchase. But the answer above is only part of the whole. By repetition and the whole assembly of elements constituting advertising, the long term aim is the recording of the message beyond consciousness (Pope, 2003, 4).

The previously mentioned author states in his book *Making Sense of Advertisements* that the tobacco industry has always confirmed that advertising objectives are creating customer loyalty and creating the desire to smoke. The author argues his claims by exemplifying the advertisement of a cigarette brand now forgotten. The main characters of the advertisement are adult men with bruises around the eyes, as if they had just come from a fight, presenting the message "I'd rather fight than switch". Apparently one could believe that this advertisement is addressed to smokers, but the analysis of the message and image highlights strategies for gaining new customers and inducing the desire to smoke (Pope, 2003, 3).

But unfortunately not only adults get to act instinctively according to the advertising message. Another study shows a wide range of food advertising techniques and channels used to reach children and adolescents, promoting brand awareness in order to encourage the sale of cigarettes. For example, young children have been targeted by selling candy and chewing gum packages that resemble those of real cigarette brands. Commercials for the popular cigarette brands presenting young people were selectively placed in youth magazines. Promotional products (hats, sport bags, lighters with logos from cigarette brand), raffles and promotions were constantly used. Studies prove that Joe Camel cartoon character was used to promote Camel cigarettes. So 30% of the 3 years old children and over 80% of the 6 years old children could make the association between Joe Camel and a pack of cigarettes. In the three years since the launch of the cartoon, the preference for Camel cigarettes rose to 32% among adolescent smokers (Story & French, 2004, 1-17).

Thus we are now provided with solutions for any "need", "all our desires, projects and applications, all passions and all relationships are now materialized as signs and objects to be bought and consumed" (Baudrillard, 1996, 201). But the effort of this production activity is not confined just to obtaining a profit, but also to subjugate the human to matter (Baudrillard, 1996, 85-105).

### **The persuasion of advertising**

To attract attention, to recognize products and ultimately to acquire them, advertising uses a number of strategies depending on the objective of the announcement. Persuasion is defined as

more than a conviction. It is rather the distortion, modification or exchange of values, desires, beliefs and actions of others (O'Shaughnessy, O'Shaughnessy, 2004, 5). While the degree of advertising impact on adults can be problematic, it can be devastating in the case of children. TV shows do not only provide fun for children, but they "teach" how to become consumers before they reach the age of 14 (Oates *et al.*, 2002; Petruţi *et al.*, 2007). Children are the most sensitive due to age and incapacity of understanding the advertising message. That is why minors are easier to persuade compared to adults (Bansal 2010, 50). The average child is exposed to more than 40,000 TV commercials per year (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006, 2564). According to the studies, children under 8 years old cannot make a difference between advertisements and other textual or discursive forms offered on television, more than a third of children believing the advertisements, regardless their backgrounds (Oates *et al.*, 2002; Petruţi *et al.*, 2007; Nash *et al.*, 2009; Dovey *et al.*, 2011; Olsen, 2010).

Advertising studies indicate that there are several types of strategies of persuasion. Among the techniques of persuasion there are:

- Bandwagon
  - it uses arguments which create certainty that people must act just as everyone does
  - product purchase will be made because people want to belong to a certain group
  - shoppers believe that if more people purchase the product, this means that the product is qualitative.
  
- Bait and Switch
  - buyers are attracted because they are promised that they will receive something (usually a discount) if they purchase the product;
  - shoppers are convinced to buy and then to spend much more.
  
- Celebrity Spokesperson
  - famous persons present the product
  - buying affinity is achieved due to the celebrity
  
- Emotional Appeals
  - it causes feelings like fear, fear, joy, sadness, anger
  - buyers will associate the emotion with the product
  
- Glittering Generalities

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- beliefs as high patriotism, freedom, peace are highlighted
- consumers accept the received information even if they have no real support but they are part of the culture and principles of life

- Humor

- it provides a moment of relaxation, fun, entertainment, but very little information about the advertised product
- shoppers remember the product through the induced positive feelings, determining them to purchase.

- Individuality

- it appeals to the desire of uniqueness
- it transmits the satisfaction of owning an own style
- consumers see the product as stylish, distinguished, cool

- Loaded Language

- it uses contradictions in order to highlight certain aspects of the product, making it the best of all
- the words used appeal to emotions rather than reality

- Name-calling

- it uses attacks on group / individuals in order to discredit the beliefs and to highlight the product;
- buyers focus on the attack itself, not on the presented product

- Plain Folk

- it highlights ordinary consumers supporting a product
- consumers are induced the belief that the product is generally considered good

- Product Comparison

- the comparison is usually done with an inferior product, in order to highlight how special and unique qualities the product has or that it alone can fulfill the buyer's needs.

Persuasion is also realized through musicality, used colors or tones.

### Analysis of children advertisements

The advertisements analyzed below are presented on TV channels for children with the highest rating, given the number of appearances per day. Rating analysis was conducted by Kantar Media Audiences for the Romanian Association for Audience Measurement. Target audience taken into account in the measurement is older than four years, both urban and rural. According to the data from Kantar Media Audiences, the audiences recorded by the programs for children in 2014, 2015 and the first five months of 2016 have remained high, exceeding the rankings of TV programs such as Acasă, B1, Pro Cinema, DigiSport 1, AXN, Realitatea TV, Digi 24, TVR 2, History Channel, National Geographic or Discovery. There are currently six programs for children who meet the criteria set by the Romanian Association for Audience Measurement and the results can be tracked in the table that we have synthesized below, the numbers representing the viewers per minute.

	2014		2015		2016		Evolution in 2016	
	Rating		Rating		Rating		Rating	
	National	Urban	National	Urban	National	Urban	National	Urban
Disney	99468	45840	83750	40000	92000	40600	+8250	+600
Cartoon Network	57609	23271	61667	28500	72600	29400	+10933	+900
Disney Junior	50493	33095	50333	31667	54800	31200	+4467	-467
Boomerang	40805	21297	44250	23250	49600	24600	+5350	+1350
Minimax/A+	38688	11499	35667	9250	44000	16400	+8333	+7150
Nickelodeon	36125	22950	32583	19833	21800	13000	-10783	-6833
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>323188</b>	<b>157952</b>	<b>308250</b>	<b>152500</b>	<b>334800</b>	<b>155200</b>	<b>26550</b>	<b>2700</b>

### *Corso ice cream (the serpent)*

In this advertisement there are 3 adults. One of them is turned into a "snake" being wrapped in a carpet and trying to reach the ice creams that his friends are baiting him with. The advertisement highlights a moment of fun, but it is silent about the advertised product, with the exception of one frozen ice cream that is presented in its pack for less than one second at the beginning, showing the name of the product.

The advertisement lasts 15 seconds and ends with "of Corso you are Corso! Crazy at all, all, all!". It draws attention to the background sounds and vocalizations during the playback. The setting is as neutral as possible with mostly grays colors, being put in the background, almost unclear. In the foreground there are two ice creams. It can be seen here a name-called strategy because the buyers focus on the actions of the young people. I also consider that buyers will remain with a

pleasant feeling offered by the ad and the product will be associated with the sensations. This advertisement is one of the most played during cartoon programs. The key question is how appropriate is to present this material to children, which passes beyond the children's desire for entertainment.

*Johnson's gleaming hair*

In this advertisement it is presented a Johnson's baby shampoo. The protagonists are two girls and their mother. The announcement lasts over 29 seconds. The setting is placed in the bathroom and in the girls' room primary and towards the end of the ad on grass in a playground. The inner setting is dominant in the presentation, where the predominant colors of things, decorations and furniture is pink and white. There are also many white pencil drawings showing the royal symbols (the crown and different decorations). The advertisement's message is played back in lyrics, but as a story, by a male voice with a cheerful melody:

*A fost o dată  
o zâna minunată  
care a zis ușor:  
să fie multă spumă  
pentru un păr sclipitor  
pa ra pa ra pa pa!  
Și viața s-a colorat  
și păsărelele au cântat  
când soarele a zâmbit  
peste regatul înflorit,  
și ca prin magie părul prințesei un râu de satin a devenit.  
Descoperă noua gamă Johnsons baby păr sclipitor pentru mica ta prințesă, păr nobil.*

There can be seen repeating words such as princess and hair, highlighted by the song but also by symbols. The ad itself appeals to the emotional side of the viewers because each of them want to be princesses from fairy tales and cartoons, and now they are presented a product that would help them to be one. The product itself is poorly presented, but emphasizes its ability to raise the viewers to the rank of little princesses.

In conclusion, there can be seen that advertisements do not have a simple informational role, but also a persuasive one and children are the easiest target of all because they do not have the ability of understanding the advertising message. And this leads to an ethical question because their free will is attacked through the invasive stimuli that make them want the advertised product, inducing them a need that they do not really have. More than that, the appeal to the emotions makes the advertisement harder to resist and the music makes the message more difficult to forget even after a long period of time.

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