
***EXPLORATORY RESEARCH REGARDING THE INFLUENCE OF TV SPOTS ON
CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR***

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Abstract : The desire of the current, urban consumer to buy and eat healthy or organic food is the paradox of the reality offered by the manufacturers of processed foods with ingredients extremely harmful to the body, given that media promotes aggressive , including through the TV spots, the fast food eating, the fizzy drinks and the sweet desserts or different children products. Psychological and sociological studies have shown that the TV spots to food presented on television, in which is enhanced the pleasure generated by the taste of products, encourage both children and adults, to consume daily more food, thus contributing to the spread of obesity, confirming the advertising ideology that advertising is an focused industry obsessively seeking the pleasure, and the rush for pleasure would cause a so-called "mechanical pleasure" permanently controlled by visual or olfactory stimulus. To demonstrate the role of advertising on consumption habits, into this article were analyzed the marketing policies of food producers of fast food and sweets, unhealthy food, with children as the first consumers, so can be shown the contribution of the TV spots into the formation of consumer habits among the small viewers. Unfortunately, the results have confirmed that although the adults are aware of the negative effects of unhealthy products on children's health and bodies, the advertising continues to be a factor in generating a phenomenon of so called "domination of children on parents' for the acquisition of unhealthy products.

Keywords: *TV spots, consumer, children, food, fast food, unhealthy.*

Advertising - a social phenomenon

Starting from the assertion that advertising is part of human nature (Kleppner, 1942/1979), we support the fact that the individual perceives and identifies quickly those goods which are advertised, those goods whose qualities are enhanced by a message targeted, for attracting the consumer's attention on certain products by the seller dates back to the emergence of the exchange in society (e.g. in ancient China, the vendors attracted the attention of buyers on certain products by a wind instrument, similar to the today flute).

The advent of the type of press with moveable letters of Johannes Gutenberg in the mid XV century and the emergence of newspapers, a century later, are prerequisites for the development of the act of promoting certain products through personalized messages. The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century offers the advertising the infrastructure to promote messages to consumers (the development of photography, phone and cinema) and a wide range of consumer goods. With the advent and development of radio, television and

internet in the twentieth century, as channels broadcasting advertising messages, the advertising reaches the maximum level of development, emerging as a distinct field of activity within the national economies.

From the perspective of developing terminology, we might consider as synonymous the notions of advertising and publicity, assimilating them to the materials broadcast by the media. From the strict perspective of the message communicated and the issuer, that which until yesterday was called, in general, "advertisement", it is now called "advertising" or "publicity" (Chelcea, 2012). But the clear difference between the notion of advertising and publicity we think it is understood most correctly by Rodica Cîrnu: *advertising means in particular the process, the ability to disseminate the advertisements, the advertising is the actual product of the process* (Cîrnu, 2012).

However, the literature (Balasubramanian, 1994) distinguishes between advertising - the communication paid by a sponsor clearly identified - and publicity - messages that are not paid by an identified sponsor - for which advertising is seen as credible and objective (in the latter case, as an example, we refer to those general interest messages broadcast on TV on some recommendations for health).

Together with the development of the mass media, the promotion of products from a marketing perspective, by focusing the advertising discourse on the commercial advertising have led to the development of advertising and advertising strategies. Thus, we determine a dynamic of the advertising phenomenon by changing the perception on the consumer, meaning that if in the nineteenth century, the typical consumer was perceived as a rational individual, centred on serving the individual interest through the qualities of the product, in the mid-twentieth century, the consumers are perceived as irrational, emotional and self-centred individuals, for which the advertising message is assigned symbols of the product quality, while at the end of the twentieth century, the consumer is perceived by his/her lifestyle, for which the advertisement focuses on the consumer benefits, promoting even a personalised address to the social group which includes the consumer. This tendency to potentiate the consumer benefits by eating certain foods, from physiological to the social benefits, is found on all current food advertising, the advertisement being poor in terms of presenting the real nutritional qualities of the products.

The commercial and marketing purpose pursued by the economic agents is to convince the public concerning the purchase of certain products, so that it is correct to add the concept of persuasion to the concept of advertising. The conclusion reached by most scholars (Nicola & Peter, 2001) is that advertising is a form of persuasive communication, serving to alter the behaviour of the receptors/consumers in the sense of the purchase a product / service whose qualities are enhanced as real.

In this context of the advertising evolution, we determine that what changed was not only the perception of the consumer as individual regarding the advertising message, the communication tone and the propagation environments, but also the target consumer group from the demographic perspective, distinguishing between the advertising destined to children and the one addressing the adults, and in the latter case, the publicity addressed to the women distinct from the one addressed to the men.

Children - an important segment of consumers and recipients of the advertising message

Although children do not have financial resources for acquisitions, and up to certain ages they do not perceive the notion of trade or sale, their physiological and social needs (assimilated to the play and interaction with the children of their age) are acknowledged by them and they express their wishes within the family regarding the purchase of certain products destined to them, turning most often to emotional tools, or these products being used as incentives by the parents in certain activities or results required from the children.

The fact that there are advertisements for food, and not only, destined to children (from specific foods - sweets, meat or dairy products, juices, fast food - to clothing products, toys and places of activities), advertisements in which children are the main characters, but also the target group of the receptors of the advertising message prompted conducting numerous studies on the impact of advertising on the children's behaviour, in time, and especially on the feeding behaviour in the current context of increased incidence of obesity among children .

Children are a favorite target group for marketing activities in light of their age-specific products, but also because it exerts considerable influence within the family on purchasing decisions. Thus, in the case of games and toys spots specific for the age and sex of children, parents, in satisfying the children's needs and as a manifestation of their care towards them, will be influenced in the decision to purchase a particular product by the child's option, option which is often enhanced by the TV spots seen by children (it has been demonstrated scientifically that in recent years the presence of children watching TV increases daily to the detriment of the duration of outdoor and recreational activities).

The commercialization of childhood is a reality nowadays, children being regarded as a promising future market and thus becoming the target of advertising and promotional campaigns from early on to create over time a loyalty to a particular brand / brand (Moore, 2004) .

Another category of products destined primarily to the use of children, in terms of marketing strategy, are food - food and drink - products on whose purchase, the children may have a particular influence on parents (Sřndergaard, Edelenbos, 2007). At the same time, Sřndergaard and Edelenbos's study shows that children are perceived in terms of marketing, as teenagers and adults who will buy in the future, for which the companies' interest to become popular with children at an early age will reward in the future by winning loyal customers / consumers on the long-term (i.e. McDonalds, Coca Cola).

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), more and more preschool children spend more time watching television: two thirds of preschoolers spend on average 2 hours daily watching TV, TV programs or games, while the youth between 8 and 18 spend an average of 4 hours per day watching TV and another 2 hours a day in front of computer and video games (Boyland & Halford, 2012).

The first two years of life are important in the physical and psychological development of the child, during this period, the child having mainly an imitation behaviour so that the prolonged and inadequate exposure to different types of television programs, some including advertisements, may influence the child's behaviour, developing certain aggressive or inhibitive reactions. As the child grows, the prolonged exposure to television, to the detriment

of interaction with the family or with the children of his/her age affects the child's sociability, the liaising with family members and even lespots to social isolation. Its approach regarding the TV commercials, exhilarating music, colours, movement and often using the popular characters among children, captures their attention, some researchers speak of a hypnotic effect commonly used in the persuasion tactics on children (Rozendall, 2011).

We can not totally deny the educational role of television programs regarding the knowledge and information transmitted, but the use of the TV as a teacher gives addiction to the detriment of other educational activities, such as reading. Also, the children's access to inappropriate TV programs for their age can lead to unhealthy behaviours and dangerous attitudes, increasing the children's curiosity, and can cause conflicts in their relationship with their parents or teachers.

In today's context of food industry development, by using different enhancers and additives, of the expansion of fast-food meals, the manufacturers of food products destined to children use TV advertisements in order to draw children's attention on the products, not infrequently showing them the possibility to receive a toy as a gift when purchasing food products (ex. McDonalds products, Danonino, Kinder). In the same advertising context, however, information on the nutritional and / or caloric content of these products is not provided.

TV spots for food products

From the marketing perspective, establishing the food advertising strategy is motivated by the perception of the consumers' needs, so that the product offered meets the needs of an identified consumer. So far, in the food spots, the qualities that meet the consumers' needs are enhanced, from the basic physiological needs to the social ones, fact which should not surprise us if the advertising message is that this product is consumed in the family, together with friends or at school.

In terms of technological development and advertising penetration including on the Internet, the television remains one of the most powerful sources of communication, for which it is not surprising that television advertising is the main propagation medium for advertising, particularly food - food and drinks for children - where the image plays the lead role (Abbatangelo-Gray, Byrd-Bredbenner, & Austin, 2008).

The connection between the senses - sight, smell and appetite - particularly enhanced in food adverts was investigated in terms of the increase in the receiver's appetite and desire to eat, even if the body does not feel the need to eat. Thus, it appeared that viewing the commercials for food generates imbalances in the brain by increasing the levels of the ghrelin hormone, which induces a feeling / desire to eat, even if physiologically the body does not feel this need.

This stimulation induced intentionally favours the unhealthy foods producers, for six out of ten food advertisements are advertisements to unhealthy products (fast food and / or snack food, sweets, breakfast cereals, carbonated drinks) show numerous studies conducted throughout the world (Boyland et al., 2011), (Kelly et al., 2010).

Also, studies carried out (Nash et al., 2009) in recent years prove the use of certain techniques of persuasion in case of food commercials, strategies which introduce rewards, positive or negative appraisals, the presentation of similar but inferior products in terms of

quality, or images of personalities who use that product. Thus, one method of persuasion involves creating a need or the appeal to the existing need, another method emphasizes the individual's need to be popular or similar to the others who use such a product. Using words with an impact together with convincing images represents another method of persuasion in case of TV advertising (e.g. presenting a child drinking a glass of juice "100% Natural" or a child who consumes a dairy product in order to grow up and become healthy) .

Another technique of persuasion used in adverts for food is presenting an incidental product compared to the central product of the advertisement, or the primary product, the special qualities of the latter being underlined, together with the benefits it brings to the consumers, unlike the incidental one (it is not necessarily identified as a competitive product), a procedure used in about one third of the food commercials (Adams, Tyrrell, & White, 2011).

Other manufacturers of unhealthy foods products use in advertisements different personalities from artistic, sporting environment, media or movie characters - especially the animated films for children - or as the image on the packaging, so that the presence of these celebrities, inducing the idea that and they also consume the product regularly, obtains the effect of increasing the consumer's confidence in the use of that product line, causing the product acquisition, sometimes without other nutritional information being required. For the products intended to the consumption of children, food products are accompanied by different toys representing the beloved character offered as a gift when purchasing the food product.

It is scientifically proven (Harris, Bargh & Brownell, 2009) that food advertisements have the greatest impact on children, especially on eating habits, children are very easily influenced by visual stimuli. Also, the TV spots for food products give birth to preferences for certain food products, thus developing an induced eating behaviour that parents accept directly by purchasing those food products.

The effects of advertising on children's behaviour demonstrated by scientific studies

The abundance of food commercials for all sorts of food brings about the increase for the demand for food products on the market, this being the mercantile aim pursued by the producers, even if the consumer actually does not need a particular product, but under the impulse of the advertisement (the advertisement subliminally induces the idea of a potential benefit brought by the product advertised) s/he will acquire it at least once to try it. Occasionally a stray general interest message appears in some advertising blocks, when for a few seconds we are informed in a dry way, without animation or other visual stimuli that "the consumption of salt, sugar and fat is harmful to our health", after that, advertisements to processed foods being broadcasted.

The ease with which people are influenced by the images is fully exploited by the advertising producers, particularly in terms of food, but we will not encounter suggestive images regarding the consumption of fresh fruits or vegetables, and not an individual's satisfaction when s/he takes a hearty bite of fruit.

Although we do not immediately realize, the daily and prolonged exposure to commercials in the advertising blocks creates in us a certain totally unhealthy eating behaviour, for the exposure to images in which individuals consume different foods with

pleasure, even if we do not identify ourselves with a particular brand or mark of the ones promoted on TV, generates the momentum to consume foods without this consumption being assimilated to the sensation of hunger. Such induced food behaviour, totally unhealthy has led in the recent decades to an alarming increase in obesity, a disease that is spreading not only among adults but also children.

Studies in the XXI century (Crespo et al, 2001) have demonstrated the link between the incidence of childhood obesity and watching TV, meaning that the prevalence of obesity increases in children who spend more than 4 hours daily on television, as well as the prevalence of obesity mainly in the case of girls over boys, having the same trigger: the excess in watching television. Thus, in the material presented by Crespo et al. (2001), the results were in that girls who spend more than 5 hours a day watching TV programs consume in addition 175kcal daily without increasing physical activity, compared with the girls watching TV one hour daily.

The unjustified increase of the food intake in children is due to the habit of eating in front of the television, a bad habit usually induced by parents in order to cause the children to eat, because eating in front of the TV, especially snacks including pastries, cereal, candy, ice cream, fries, has repercussions on the eating behaviour of the future adult (Marquis, Filion & Dagenais, 2007).

Every day, given the program schedule, the children watch on average about 15 television commercials to food products, and more than 95% of them promote products high in fat, sugar and sodium. The good taste, the pleasure of eating are promoted and most of them communicate joy, cheerfulness and the fact that those products are "cool".

From the psychological point of view, it is proven that the significance of an advertisement is understood and influences the food choices of a child around the age of four, while only around the age of 10-11 years old, the children can identify the 'bad' or unhealthy foods, for which up to that age they can not make healthy choices, the children having only wishes augmented by the TV spots.

In order to demonstrate the influence of TV commercials on food consumption decisions, and therefore on the children's behaviour, the University of Liverpool has undergone a research starting from the hypothesis that the exposure to advertising regarding food while watching different programs, contributes to the phenomenon of obesity in that it urges you to nibble any food available, not just that being advertised, and the effect is not related to hunger or other conscious influences. Both children and adults were subjected to the experiment, the unit of measure being the amount of snacks consumed both during commercial breaks and after they were no longer running (Halford et al, 2007). The study on children showed that they consumed 45% more when they were exposed to food advertising during programs broadcasting cartoons.

Given that in the experimental groups of children, the results were analyzed separately (the food consumption during and after the exposure to TV commercials to food products) in case of the children with a normal weight compared to overweight children, another result of the research (Halford et.al., 2007) was the one which showed that after the exposure of overweight children to TV spots, the food consumption was higher than that of the normal weight children, which proves that overweight children are more responsive to TV spots.

A similar study was conducted in 2010 at Yale University on the subject of the influence of TV commercials to carbonated drinks on the children's eating behaviour, proving that within 2 years (2008-2010) exposing children and adolescents to TV spots presenting drinks rich in calories doubled, witnessing the development of a more aggressive advertising of these drinks than it was years ago, because the producing companies find new and sophisticated ways to reach the target group: children and adolescents.

Conclusions

Although the commercials to products for children create the impression that they address children directly, the advertisement actually reaches the child indirectly through parents. Thus through audio, visual and text means, the spots attract the attention of children, who does not judge the need to purchase, but their desire for that product is enhanced, for which they will insist on their parents buying the product in the advertisement, the latter sparing nothing for the happiness of their children.

It has been shown that excessive watching of television programs and developing the habit of eating in front of the TV are key factors in influencing the choices and food preferences, creating an unhealthy dietary behaviour and favouring the risk of obesity in both children and adults. As discussed in our material, as adults we have responsibility regarding our children, not only to limit to a minimum the access to television, but also to control our eating habits for our children copy our habits and attitudes, learning by imitation.

Research has shown that food advertisements have a far greater impact on overweight children and those prone to obesity, as opposed to the impact on thin children or those with normal weight, although viewing an advertisement to a food invariably increases the child's desire for that product, but in a lower proportion than the desire generated into an overweight child.

Although the studies carried out have focused on the favourite unhealthy foods (fast food products, snack foods, sweets, soft drinks) and it was intended to highlight the negative consequences of the marketing strategies on the eating behaviour of children, the potential of promoting through marketing strategies the consumption of healthy products among children (fresh fruit and vegetables and less processed) remains an open field for analysis and working hypotheses. Thus, given the particular impact of advertising on children's behaviour, the advertising must be operated also with medical purposes, not just commercial ones.

Because the impact of advertising to food products on children's behaviour, it is scientifically proven, being a dimension of the present social reality, it is necessary to adopt legislative and administrative measures in order to restrict the availability of unhealthy food in areas frequented mainly by children and the adoption of strict regulations in the field of advertising and sponsorship, which would aim to prohibit and sanction those who promote forms of advertising to food products by fake means, creating a false or misleading impression on the characteristics, as well as accompanying the food advertising by specific health and safety warnings regarding the children consumption

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