



CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS, LAWYERS AND RELIGIOUS PERSONS

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ABSTRACT

To understand whether advertising is organized as a shared social representation, our research has focused on the social representations of a sample of subjects in which the development of the "standard" is not accidental, but rather the goal of their profession: it is lawyers who represent how subjects relate to "legal standards", priests with the "ideological standard", and parents with the "socio-educational standard" in the context of television, advertising and children. Especially considering whether ads should fit the already established children's time. For children, unlike adults, television is not a form of relaxation and escape because for them it involves great effort and hard work that they make through processes involving cognitive factors such as attention, understanding, memory, taste and identification. The methodology is qualitative and quantitative, through surveys. Confidence and willingness to buy are closely related to understanding, an area in which there are no references to gender. Boys and girls being eight years old show high confidence in the advertising message, they believe in the persons appearing in the advertisements and have a strong purchasing power on their own parents.

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KEY WORDS

Standard - Television - Advertising - Children - Parents - Priests- Lawyers - Cognitive factors - Children's time

LOS NIÑOS Y LA PUBLICIDAD DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE PADRES, ABOGADOS Y RELIGIOSOS

RESUMEN

Para entender si la publicidad está organizada como una representación social compartida, la investigación se ha centrado en las representaciones sociales de una muestra de sujetos en los que la elaboración de la “norma” no es casual, sino más bien el objetivo de su profesión: se trata de abogados, que representan cómo los sujetos se relacionan con las “normas jurídicas”, sacerdotes, con la “norma ideológica” y padres, con la “norma socioeducativa”, en el contexto de la televisión, la publicidad y los niños. Especialmente en la consideración acerca de si los anuncios deberían ajustarse al ya establecido horario infantil. Para los niños, a diferencia de los adultos, la televisión no es una forma de relajación y evasión ya que para ellos implica gran empeño y gran esfuerzo, que realizan a través de procesos en los que intervienen factores cognitivos como: la atención, la comprensión, el recuerdo, el gusto y la identificación. La metodología empleada es tanto cualitativa como cuantitativa, a través de encuestas. La confianza y la disposición de compra están estrechamente relacionadas con la comprensión, área en la que no aparecen referencias de género. Los niños y las niñas de ocho años muestran una alta confianza en el mensaje publicitario, creen a las personas que aparecen en los anuncios y ejercen un fuerte poder de compra sobre sus propios padres.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Norma - Televisión - Niños - Publicidad - Padres - Religiosos - Abogados - Factores cognitivos - Horario infantil.

I. INTRODUCTION

Television is a source of extraordinary socialization for children as it proposes images of reality that instruct on proper behavior to social conventions. TV content is generated by considering a hypothetical imaginary audience and always based on acculturating. Thus, children who watch a lot of TV tend to compare their reality with that shown on the screen rather than with the existing reality. Thus there is early socialization, ie a primary significant virtual experience substituting for direct experience.

Advertising offers children representations aimed at strengthening and confirming, for example, the formation of gender patterns, that is, the expectations generated by the fact of being a male or a female. And those patterns have much influence on

understanding and memorizing the advertising message and, in its simple form, they encourage the creation of stereotypes, ie the automatic thought processes.

1.1 TV watching process in children

The TV watching process is the end product of complex interplay between multiple factors derived either from the viewer's characteristics or from the TV input. This involves activation of cognitive skills such as attention, understanding and memory, through which a circular relationship interaction occurs.

For children, unlike adults, television is not a form of relaxation and escape because, for them, it involves commitment and effort. Children also have a capacity of reprocessing, interpretation and evaluation of information according to their age.

Moreover, it happens that the children learning through TV depends largely on the knowledge they already have: according to the theory of Piaget, the information given to children is transformed in order to adapt to the existing knowledge, the price of a partial distortion of such information. This adaptation occurs through two complementary processes: assimilation and modification. Assimilation indicates the act of absorbing information by using existing mental structures. Modification refers to the process of adapting information in order to add new knowledge.

1.2. But at what age is the child an aware TV watcher? And how does cognitive development occur?

The acquisition of awareness during childhood is a complex process involving perception, memory, attention, classification, reasoning ... that is, all those processes that the child uses to adapt to the world around him.

The study of cognitive development has been built on two major theoretical lines: one is that of Piaget and the other is based on the theory of information processing.

Piaget (1973) established the hypothesis that the cognitive development of children is divided into a series of states of thought and each corresponds to a profound change in the logic and structure of intelligence. His theory of cognitive development includes four fundamental stages:

a) Sensory-motor (0-2 years): the child's interactions with the environment occur through sensory actions. At this stage, children gradually construct knowledge and understanding of the world by coordinating experiences (such as sight and hearing) with physical interaction with objects (such as grasping and sucking).

b) Pre-operational (2-7 years): the child develops the ability to use symbols and verbal representations of objects; He begins to understand the classification but the thought is, at this stage, characterized by self-centeredness. The child, for example, collects several images of the world but couples them in his eyes through his own fantasy without respecting the laws of logic. It is at the end of this stage when the ability to take on the perspective of another person arises.

c) Concrete operations (7-12 years): the child begins to understand the laws of conservation of mass, length, weight and volume; He is able to classify, sort and arrange objects as long as they can be viewed and manipulated, since, at this stage, hypothetical thinking has not appeared yet.

d) Formal operations (from 12 years): abstract reasoning begins and the ability to formulate and test hypotheses develops.

Piaget, in developing these four stages, did not take television into account but it is clear that just the thought of a formal nature is the only one that could result in aware consumption of television.

Children are passive TV watchers but active participants in the context and characteristics due to various competences. The development theory proposes three levels of competence:

- a) Preparation with a limit is typical for children being less than 8 years who have not yet matured enough strategies. For example, they have difficulty distinguishing the main contents from the secondary ones.
- b) Development with stimuli is typical of subjects being from 8 to 12 years who are trained to develop information in the right way but only if they can rely on external stimuli that can be helpful.
- c) Development with a strategy is typical of subjects being 11 years and older who, to understand reality, use strategies of imagination and retrieval of efficient information.

TV monitoring, especially if you count on the advice of developmental psychologists, can act to create indication of the level of difficulty of the contents on relations of understanding and satisfaction in conjunction with the specific age of the subjects.

Programs can be adapted to the cognitive skills of children: accessible as an area of approximate development, being complicated enough to arouse satisfaction and interest.

1.3. Cognitive factors that occur when children watch television

1.3.1. Attention

The fact that a child is not able to stop and look at anything that scares or attracts him is surely a sign that attention is a fundamental feature in the vision of the little TV watcher.

This perceptual experience is certainly stronger in the younger audience because neural-physiological apparatuses are in the process of training and attention is susceptible to all the features of television text.

The relevance of perception can be enabled by the features present in all programs dedicated to children, such as intensity, movement, change, novelty, surprise and incongruity.

The intensity of the message received by the child plays with the strong emotional contents that television is able to evoke, and all actions presented on television are much stronger than those presented in another medium.

The continuous movement of objects on the screen requires constant attention and evokes a continuous response from the watcher: the nervous system, therefore, is activated with every change of scene and frame, and orientation of vision prevents distraction during watching itself. The frames that are given in rapid succession (24 per second), determine the perception of motion; mounting rhythm can directly influence the excitation of the watcher and, generally, his psycho-physiological status.

The rapid and sudden change of scenes creates absence of cognitive inference, leaving the possibility for children to reflect on what they have just seen, as successive images and sounds engulf the previous ones. Physiologically, humans tend to focus their attention to the sounds that are produced in their presence, this way, children will hear any sound that occurs around.

The novelty represents a characteristic capable of attracting particularly children, who have very short periods of attention and therefore are not often able to follow the thread or the plot of a chapter, so they are surprised with the scenes which have a new element.

Surprise, as novelty, is widely used in TV programs intended for children because television is an instrument of attraction that cannot normally be escaped.

Incongruity plays in the same way as novelty with the rather very brief times of attention of the minor audience, overlooking in fact the logical connections, the TV watcher does not lower his attention span, focusing now on this, now on that.

All these features present on children-targeting television programs concur to enable voluntary and involuntary mechanisms of attention.

According to the theory of exploration and search of Huston and Wright (1983), if the child is constantly exposed to television he will acquire the ability to select, recognize and predict the contents of a program on the basis of formal features that characterize it. This way, the child will be able to redirect his attention to what seems most significant.

We should not forget the existing cognitive differences in the various ages: these also influence, from a motivational point of view, the child's choice to direct or not his attention to a given stimulus. The child will pay more attention to programs that are compatible with his own cognitive abilities and correspond to his own requirements.

There are three dimensions which contribute to the activation of attention in children: the characteristics of the stimulus, the desire to understand (motivation) and cognitive skills. These factors influence each other and their interaction triggers or not the attention of young audiences.

1.3.2. Comprehension

It is difficult to define what "understanding" a television program is. It is easier to use an operational or behavioral definition: one can say that one understands "X" if one properly reacts to that particular stimulus. For example, one can say one understands a television program if one is attentively looking at the screen, if one remembers a certain number of facts, or if the subject can make an articulate explanation of the story.

The theory of exploration and search of Houston and Wright (1983), assuming the active role of the child, confirms that continuous experience of watching television allows acquisition of higher skills, including the ability to recognize and predict the content of a program based on the formal characteristics. According to this theory, in younger children, attention is which guides to understanding whereas, for older children, understanding is which determines attention.

The relationship between attention and understanding can be interpreted in two main perspectives: a) cognitive development and b) learning systems.

- a) *Attention in little children is related to the development of cognitive ability.* Children, as they grow, become less "linkable / tied" to stimuli and make less effort to capture the content of programs, as they are better able to select the most relevant information. Understanding is obviously influenced by attention but, at the same time, the level of understanding the information transmitted through the television stimulus influences the level of attention and motivation with which the medium is consumed. Children increase their attention and cognitive effort in the case of poorly comprehensible material, to the point that when they realize they do not understand, they are distracted
- b) *Active processes and understanding are guided by learning systems:* attention, both in the child and in an adult, is related to their cognitive systems, to their previous experiences and their own expectations. Recognition, processing, storage, integration and the ability to infer are skills used for understanding and they all are strongly influenced by age. Many studies have suggested that younger children do not understand causal sequences very well, have difficulty making inferences and understanding the implicit contents.

Understanding a television program it is tied to familiarity, whether as a formal or content-related characteristic. This is sometimes artificially produced by a repetition, within a narrative format, facts, behaviors, words or expressions. An element of familiarity is the ability to identify with one or more characters seen on television. If the child recognizes himself in the character and the story shown on television, his understanding will be more efficient.

D'Alessio (2003, 2007) highlights how understanding a program results from the social competence a child has acquired in his family and cultural context. Children are better able to pay attention, to love, to understand and to remember the content transmitted by characters who, one way or another, are similar to them.

Rice, Huston and Wright (1982) have proposed a theoretical model to explain how the level of understanding the TV stimulus is related to the attention and interest of children: too difficult or too easy contents may be incomprehensible or boring.

1.3.3. Memory

Retaining information in one's memory is related to the age and cognitive development of the child but also to the characteristics of the television message.

The complex development of the mnemonic function at an evolutionary age can be summarized in three main principles:

The first one states that *older children need less time to accumulate information*. It is true that newborns are able to retain some information about the surrounding environment and to distinguish new information from that they have previously gathered, but what changes depending on the age is the speed with which this occurs, it increases exponentially after the first year of life.

The second principle concerns the persistence of memory: *older children remember longer*. A study to support the direct relationship between age and retention time was conducted by Morgan and Hayne (2002), with children being 1, 2, 3 and 4 years. In

this paper, the authors made the children become familiar with a very intimate, bright, colorful and busy visual stimulus for a period of 10 seconds. All children were on a stimulus-recognizing test, some immediately, others after a time interval varying from one day to one month. In the phase in which it was required to recognize the stimulus immediately after the presentation, no differences in terms of age were revealed; such differences were clearly expressed with the introduction of retention time intervals. One-year-old children could recognize the stimulus whenever they were asked immediately after seeing it; 2-year-old children could remember it at least for a day; 3-year-old children increased their capacity to retain up to a week and 4-year-old children up to a month.

The third principle refers to the fact that *older children are able to use more stimuli to support memories*. A key feature of memory development is increased flexibility in retrieving memories. With age, the number of signs used to retrieve memories begins to gradually increase, thus, older children are able to access their own mental representations in a wider range of situations.

Research has shown that, depending on age, the memory of television content changes. Retention of TV content by preschoolers develops through a massive concentration on the core elements of the story, as a result of a selection mechanism that leads to a partial coding in a memory less rich compared to those memories in older children.

Moreover, qualitative and quantitative aspects of memory are closely related to language and cognitive development: we certainly know that, already at the end of compulsory education, child's mnemonic benefits are comparable to those of an adult.

1.3.4. Taste

a.

When it comes to small consumers, researchers seem to agree that they have different tastes, but we know little more about the process of formation of choice and preference.

It has been demonstrated that, since they are three years, children are able to firmly express their preferences regarding what they want to eat, wear, watch, or that which they want to play with (D'Alessio and Laghi, 2006). But what are the factors that determine taste for specific television programs? Why do they not like some programs?

The model of uses and gratifications had the merit to describe the use of television by the child as a process in which the child is an active part and not simply an object exposed to a stimulus. The consumer has a selective approach to choosing a program: the use of the media is oriented to an end and this is to satisfy their psychological needs. The scientific literature attributes the ability to meet five kinds of needs to the media:

- a. Cognitive: need for acquisition and strengthening of knowledge and understanding.
- b. Affective aesthetic: need for strengthening the aesthetic and emotional experience.
- c. Integrative at the level of personality: need for tranquility, emotional stability, increased credibility and status.

- d. Socially inclusive: need to strengthen interpersonal contacts.
- e. Evading: needs aimed at reducing tension and conflicts.

The social context in which the recipient or receiver lives can determine and influence the kinds of needs that television can cover. For example, if the social environment produces tensions and conflicts to the child, he will use the media mainly to mitigate this state of malaise. Or if the real opportunities to meet certain needs are scarce, such as cognitive needs in the case of a poor socio-educational environment in the transmission of knowledge, children can seek to meet this need through the media.

In a research, D'Alessio (2007) asked 500 preschool children what their favorite program was and asked them to explain their choice. To facilitate the response and make the interview funnier, cards representing the protagonists of the programs live broadcast by RAISAT were created. The children being from 3 to 6 years seemed to have no difficulty explaining why they chose a program: the cartoon Drago, whom they liked because "does the dishes" or "makes a cake". The choice seems to be linked to simple and easily described contents, actions that are not far from their daily meeting their needs of personality integration through the use of a calming product because it is familiar.

The need for evasion seems to be satisfied: they like the program because "it is nice", "it's fun".

Few motivations were related to cognitive needs: sometimes children stated that Drago was their favorite program because "I always see it".

1.3.5. Identification

The identification process is considered in psychology to be a form of learning through the experience of others. This makes it possible to consider identification as:

- a) A normal process of acquiring a social role
- b) A tool to increase self-esteem
- c) A means of identifying oneself with a group on the basis of ideals and common interests.

Identifying oneself with a character means proving a strong affinity toward it; This means that the TV watcher feels completely absorbed by the story, by developing empathy towards the goals, motivations and feelings of the character. The identification process uses both emotional and cognitive components of the character. Immersed in the story told, the TV watcher does not lose his ability to discern reality; Similarly, when he identifies himself with a character, he does not lose his identity, but *merely suspends it temporarily*.

Much of the literature has tried to understand how and why spectators identify themselves with stories they know are only on television and they therefore know said stories are not real. This condition can be defined as a *paradox of fiction*, through which people do not believe the events of the story are real but care deeply about the plot of the story and its characters.

To explain this paradox, they often speak of a process called *voluntary suspension of disbelief*, through which individuals deliberately ignore the story they are seeing is

not real, but the taste experience is not compromised.

Other researchers believe that suspension of disbelief is not voluntary but natural and requires a mental effort to remember that what we are seeing is just fiction.

The pleasure derived from identification is due to the realization of a desire to control one's relationship with the character and is mainly due to the ability of television to make us forget all about ourselves and participate in the world of fiction.

Control of the quality of television programming for children has paid special attention to the issue of identification, trying to identify potential risk and protective factors for the development of the child's identity.

According to the international literature, media have an undeniable impact on patterns of development: one of the effects of substantial exposure to media, for example, is the growing importance attributed to favorite television characters in the lifestyles of children.

We are aware of how television can produce collective identities and standardizing behaviors; the construction of identity as a process of internalization of values cannot be studied and analyzed without considering the model of television to which children are exposed every day.

2. OBJECTIVES

To understand whether advertising is organized as a shared social representation, our research has focused on the social representations of a sample of subjects in which the development of the "standard" is not accidental but rather the goal of their profession: it is lawyers who represent how subjects relate to "legal standards" priests with the "ideological standard" and parents with the "socio-educational standard".

Jurists, religious persons and parents try to develop a course of action that can join the ideal model for children to everyday behavior and experiences.

Everyone thinks their own assessment is, in fact, a circumstance applied, or at least applicable, to the ideal model. To achieve this continuity between the ideal model and actual experience, it is necessary to make some *adjustments*.

3. METHODOLOGY

The total study sample consisted of 414 subjects: 214 lawyers (men = 124, women = 90), 100 religious persons (priests = 60; nuns = 40) and 100 parents (male = 45, female = 55). The lawyers were subdivided according to: a) years of professional experience (1-5 years of practice = 84, 6 to 15 years = 66; over 15 years = 64) and b) proficiency (experts = 119; non-experts = 95). All subjects had a semi-structured interview; the average length of each protocol was 35 minutes. An examiner recorded and transcribed all answers. There were no gender differences within each analyzed category; for this reason, only the differences between the three groups were studied.

Lawyers and especially parents believe that advertising is too persuasive to the limited capacity of the child who fails to understand that intention.

Advertising, in this case, is obliged to protect the ideal development of the child who, at this age, is not prepared to figure out the attempt at persuasion.

The religious persons believe that advertising is very persuasive. *How do they justify that view with the general model of child protection that they profess?* Increasing, artificially and in an unjustified way, the capacities of children who, by contrast, lawyers and parents consider fairly minor.

Having "underestimated" a phenomenon, another was to be "overestimated": the child's ability. It is not so serious that children are exposed to so much advertising as they are able to understand the persuasive intent of ads. Shared social perceptions have the particularity of being structured as balanced or tending-to-balance assessments: they are wrong, but consistent and harmonious with others.

The theories that portray today's children as smarter than in the past are wrong, but they serve to justify the attribution of excessive duties and responsibilities to children.

4. RESULTS

Religious persons behave as non-experts. Maybe their "naiveté" is due to their paying little attention to the media.

Almost all respondents believe that advertisements must not be broadcast freely in all time slots and that the presence of children in the ads is inappropriate; all agree that it is neither fair nor appropriate that advertising is aimed directly at children. An average score from 1 to 2 shows a negative answer. Parents are less sympathetic; all surveyed adults prefer that there should be accurate analyzes, systematic research and experts able to recognize the dangers (with values between *agree* and *strongly agree*); all believe that television programs do not respect the laws protecting children, the group of parents being the most protective. Their experience with children makes them more competent and leads them to demand behaviors beneficial for children. All parents show a strong sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment at the low level of protection.

Lawyers and religious persons have more conciliatory positions. However, they know the legal standards and ideals, but keep them apart from reality.

The piece of research also distinguished lawyers according to their specific knowledge of the laws and regulations on television to evaluate the relationship between social representation of the subjects and their objective knowledge.

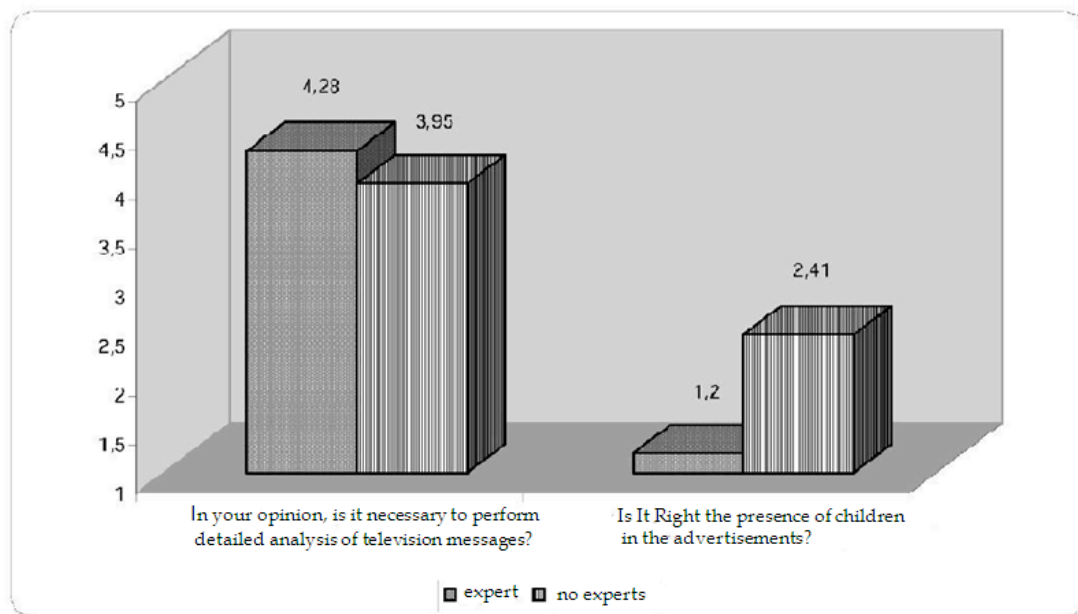


Figure 1: Expert and non-expert lawyers in television regulating standards
 Source: The Author

Connoisseurs of the rules are much more demanding:

- a) They ask for more accurate analyses;
- b) They consider the presence of children in advertising to be wholly inappropriate.

When lawyers were subsequently subdivided according to their years of professional experience, there were significant and complex differences that resulted in two behaviors:

- 1) *improving competences*: because the messages of ads are very persuasive and children are still unable to understand them perfectly, the proposed solution is: supporting experts who identify risks. Lawyers who are experts in law behave like those with more years of practice and they are more convinced of the need for quality control as a solution to poor consideration shown by television for laws protecting children, and
- 2) *setting limits*: that advertising in no way is addressed to or use children.

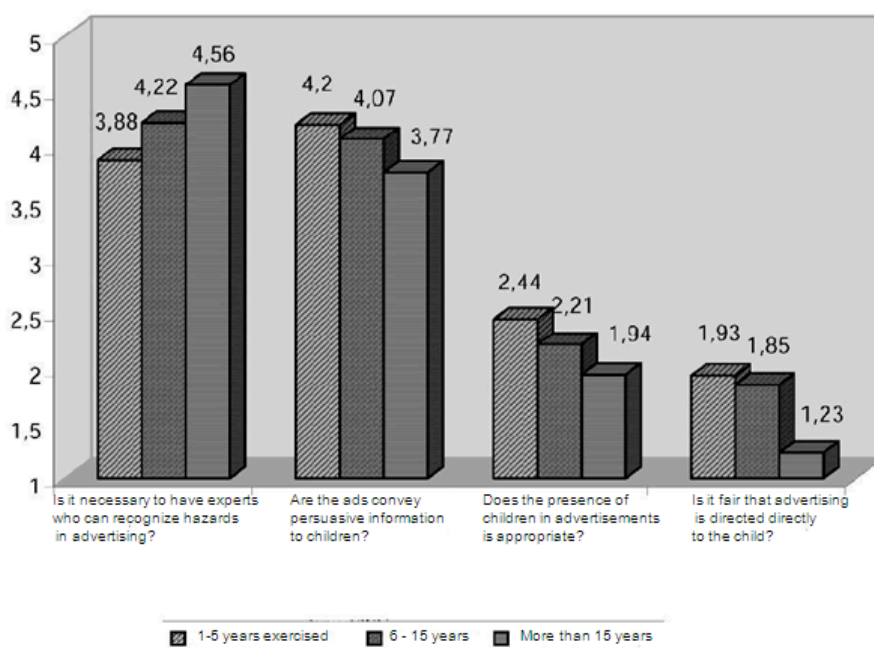


Figure 2: Lawyers with different years of practice in their profession.
 Source: Author

Both advertising and child protection are presented as shared social representations that are sensitive to variables such as the amount of knowledge and professional expertise.

For all questions, there is – not only as regards parents but also education professionals, religious persons knowledgeable in ethics and lawyers with expertise in law – evident need for experts to protect children. No group believes it can by itself protect children and prefers to have an expert do so instead of them. Why? It seems as if experts have somewhat been left aside in the social project on which education and the values of the community are based.

5. DISCUSSION

Television is part and parcel of the everydayness of very young children, even if they are not in front of the apparatus. As the baby has perfect hearing, one must wonder how much casual sound he comes to perceive.

The study of Meltzoff (1988), a classic in this topic, checked the abilities of children to mimic the actions they see on television at two different ages, 14 months and two years. The results of the experiment showed that children who receive television stimuli are able to correctly reproduce the actions when they are 14 months.

The preferences of young children are manifested at a very early age in terms of sounds, colors and food.

When being two years old, children scream in supermarkets to indicate their preferences. They associate products from shelves with those they have seen on

television and want only those products because of the "drawing" on them.

There is a well-known experiment in which three dolls were shown to a group of very young girls. Two of the dolls were very sophisticated and well done, with many functions, and there was a coarser doll, with a red mark on its chest. Most of the girls being three and four preferred the doll with the mark; the perceptual characteristics of objects, the red mark, rather than quality, dominated the choice of so young girls.

At the age of five years and afterwards, the trading strategy – often prepared in the family context – arises to reach the goal and get the product. The child has already learned to cooperate, giving and receiving explanations, it is more useful than crying and getting angry.

Around six, the child evaluates the product perceptively but more analytically: the attention remains "focused" and therefore rules out the context.

The child can tell the real from the fantastic, but within the same category, he has difficulty in classifying the contents into primary and secondary.

The age from eight to twelve years is crucial for building an aware consumer, although many authors have shown that advertisements targeting children under eight years have a greater impact. The attention paid to advertising is high, and it is only about nine years when we can say that children are aware of the attempt at persuasion.

At nine and ten, there is increasingly less interest in television: the child can change channels when advertising begins, which shows less confidence because the child manages to capture the intent of persuasion.

The studies agree in affirming that, from seven to eight years, the child begins to be able to understand the persuasive intent of advertising. Children begin to be sometimes skeptical about what television offers them and they also get to understand that the main objective of advertising is to sell products and, therefore, what is advertised is not exactly reality.

From eight years on, the ability to pay attention to details increases significantly. It is the stage of the first collections and classifications. Children develop the ability of interaction and socialization and advertising, in which brands play an important role in the relationship with the group.

At eight, the boy described by Piaget (1973) is in the middle of the period of "concrete operational", ie, he internalizes and assimilates standards and rules and wants to be differentiated from younger children.

With regard to the ability to become consumers, we can say that only after being eight years the child acquires the ability to make comparisons via an accurate analysis of specific attributes; for example: "Antonio is taller than Giovanni".

From eight to eleven, not only their knowledge increase, for example of advertising, but also, as explained by the theories about processes of information processing, children are able to remember and apply it according to the information they already have. This ability to manipulate knowledge is what Piaget calls the "formal operational" stage: from twelve on, the child can already take the place of others and try to build "working models" and hypotheses to interpret phenomena. It is about eleven years old when the child becomes aware of the attempt at persuasion of advertising: he realizes that the ad refers to an object or service for it to be purchased.

The international literature is rather poor in terms of systematic instruments of analysis of the ideas of children about advertising. This is a sign of insufficient evaluation of childhood. Everyone talks about children but there are few who care about what they think. Most of the questions are formulated in the area of approval. As if children were not able to evaluate, remember, understand or act.

Internationally, the latest instrument for measuring the behavior of children regarding advertising is the Derbaix and Pecheux scale (2003), consisting of 7 items, which investigates two dimensions: credibility and acceptance. The instrument has many limitations in both methodology and content.

Our AP scale (D'Alessio and Laghi, 2006) is a new instrument that measures the attitudes of children concerning advertising and evaluates: credibility, acceptance and willingness to buy. This last dimension is, specifically, an aspect little discussed so far.

Credibility: it refers to cognitive competence, namely the child's ability to understand the content of advertisements and tell fiction from reality.

Acceptance: it investigates the explicit opinion made by children in terms of acceptance / rejection and the feelings (intensity and direction) accompanying evaluation.

Confidence and willingness to buy: it explores the degree of confidence that the child associates with advertising messages; it is an attitude, with an emotional touch, to try to influence parents to purchase the product.

The *social perception* of advertising on children, at cognitive level, primarily involves the recognition of reality and fiction.

Perceptions are structured by building entrenched views defined as beliefs. It is important to assess magnitude and character.

All faiths have always affective and emotional connotations. The cognition-emotion binomial is essential to identify the positive or negative attitude. Memory and remembrance are very much conditioned by the emotional connotations that accompany the experiences, also television.

As for the credibility dimension, children being eight state that:

- a) advertising says true things: between *agree* and *strongly agree*²;
- b) it provides excellent tips for shopping;
- c) the people speaking in ads tell the truth

² The evaluations were measured with Likert scale comprising 5 steps (1=fully disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=fully agree)

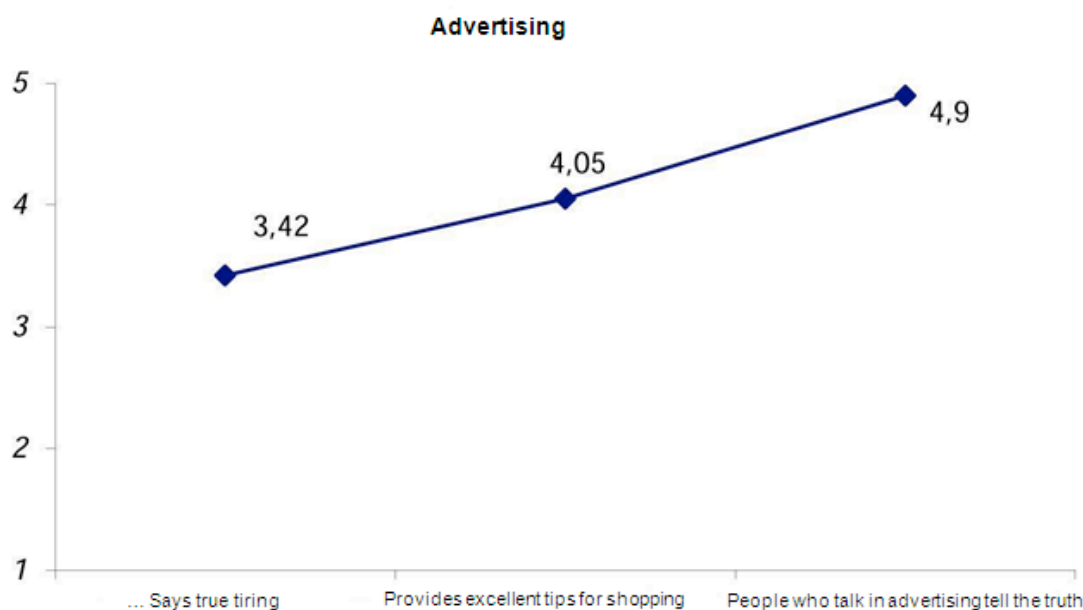


Figure 3: Perception of advertising.

Source: Author

For children, people are more truthful than the things they say. This depends on the characteristics of development of the subjects of the sample. The truth, rather than abstract things, is associated with the person who says it. Interestingly, the mean scores of the three groups of children differentiated by age are, in any case, high when you consider the maximum score that can be obtained with this scale.

Eight years represented, within the sample the maximum limit of confidence. Scores on the variable "credibility" decrease with increasing age.

Children being ten years believe less in advertisements than those being eight or nine. The difference between ages is clear and significant. The direction of responses remains positive to advertising, but the average opinion of *fully agree* becomes *agree*.

While there were no significant differences between boys and girls in the development of cognitive ability, it is possible that sexual stereotypes influence social responses about advertising.

Girls, as ads invite them to do, recognize and identify themselves at an early age as fit for shopping. This role is somehow attached to the domestic momentum and hence that understanding of advertising is fuller with trust and confidence in the young aspirants to have the role of being "responsible" for shopping.

The socioeconomic status of parents does not seem to influence the attitude of children.

This is a great merit of advertising communication. Announcements are made by excellent professionals who are able to overcome the most common barriers in society.

With regard to the variable "approval", children affirm that when there are

commercials on TV they get really bored, they sometimes even change the channel³.

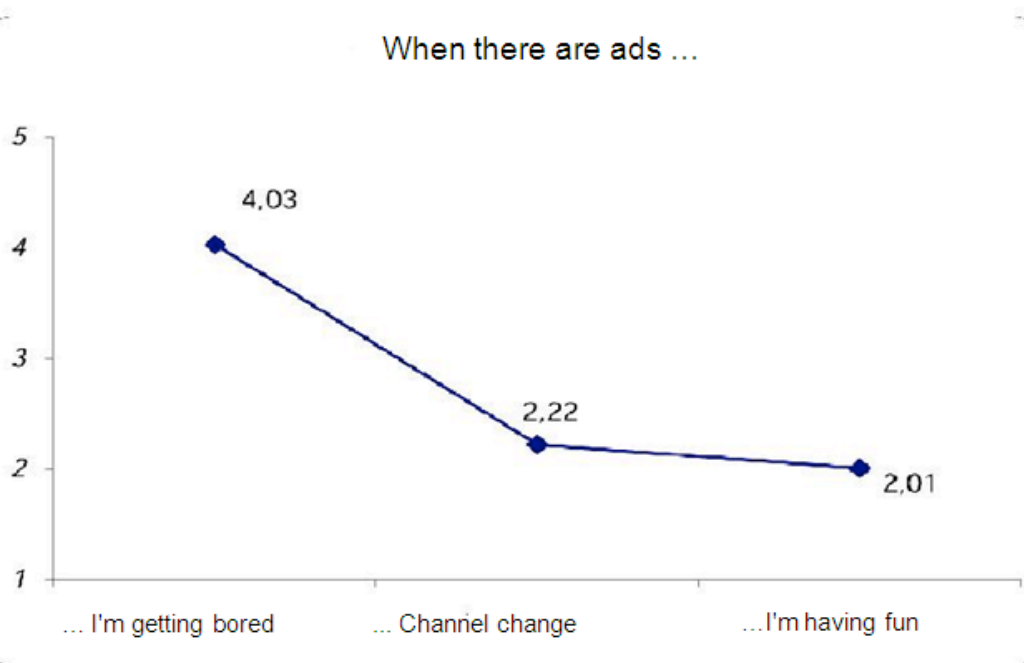


Figure 4: Perception of TV commercials.
Source: Author

As for the age and socioeconomic status, there are no significant differences, but there are as regards sex: girls like commercials more than boys.

Probably, the impulse to building school-age gender roles comprises small chores that increase attention and discriminatory competition of the "objects" by the future persons responsible for shopping.

If we compare the average scores for the variables of "credibility" and "acceptance", we can see that children believe in ads (mean = 3.86) more than they like them (mean = 1.90). This is consistent with what was mentioned above. The cognitive development of children being eight to ten years is not yet complete, so it is easier to influence their credibility than their acceptance, a variable that develops first.

As for the variables "confidence" and "willingness to buy", the children say that they trust advertising very much, they believe there is a discrete correspondence between the ad and the actual product but, above all, they have a strong buying power on their parents.

³ The evaluations were classified according to Likert scale comprising 5 steps (1=fully disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=fully agree)

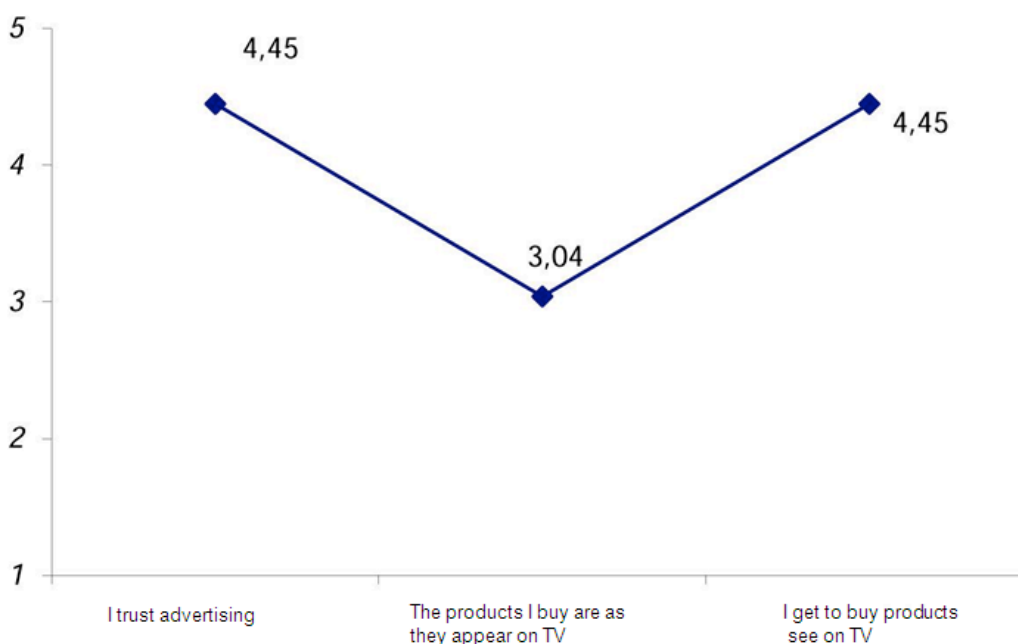


Figure 5: Relationship between expectations about the product and the acquired product.

Source: Author

Although age does not determine any statistically significant differences among the three groups, the children being ten year olds say they have less confidence and willingness to buy than the children being eight and nine years.

Finally, there are no significant gender differences, as expected. Confidence and willingness to buy are closely related to understanding, an area in which there are no references to gender. Boys and girls being eight years show high confidence in the advertising message, they believe in the people appearing in the advertisements and have a strong purchasing power on their own parents.

The quality of the ads has managed the difficult task of overcoming the barriers of sex. It is true that advertising is aimed more at girls, but when it comes to buying, it urges both sexes without any distinction.

Ads succeed in suggesting a stereotype of a woman in charge of going shopping but, at the same time, they encourage both sexes to buy

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