

**LA PUBLICIDAD, TRADICIONAL Y VIRTUAL, DE ALIMENTOS
DIRIGIDA A MENORES DE EDAD: INCIDENCIA DE LOS
CÓDIGOS DE CONDUCTA
VIRTUAL AND TRADITIONAL FOOD ADVERTISEMENT AIMED
AT CHILDREN: MEASURING THE CODES OF CONDUCT
IMPACT IN SPAIN**

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Resumen

En la actual economía de mercado, la publicidad desempeña un papel de primer orden. Entre los diversos productos que se promocionan, destacan los alimentos expresamente dirigidos a los menores de edad. Este tipo de bienes se anuncian tanto en medios tradicionales como digitales. Ahora bien, dada su composición, son susceptibles, en

ciertas ocasiones, de causar perjuicios a la salud de dicho colectivo. Para, precisamente, evitar tal menoscabo, la propia industria ha elaborado un elenco de buenas prácticas – códigos de conducta- cuya adhesión, por parte del prestador de servicios, pone de manifiesto que la empresa cumple con ciertos estándares de calidad. Estos últimos mejoran lo contemplado, con carácter mínimo, por la normativa legal. Las empresas que se han adherido a este conjunto de buenas prácticas sobre la materia, como veremos a propósito del estudio empírico realizado, incurren en una ventaja competitiva que les permite diferenciarse favorablemente frente a las demás.

Abstract

In today's market economy, advertising plays a major role. Food specially intended for the underage is promoted among various products. Such goods are advertised in both traditional and digital media. However, given its composition, they are susceptible, on occasion, to cause harm to the health of this group. To precisely avoid such impairment, the industry itself has developed a list of best practices, codes of conduct, whose membership, by the service provider, shows that the company meets certain quality standards. These outcomes contemplate, as a minimum, the legal regulations. Companies that have joined this set of best practices on the subject, as discussed with regard to the specific empirical study, incur a competitive advantage that allows them to differentiate themselves favorably to others.

Palabras clave: alimentos, calidad, menores, publicidad, salud.

Key words: food quality, underage, advertising, health, nonparametric method.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's consumer society, advertising is playing a very significant role (Story and French, 2004). Somehow, the latter is notably promoting the consumption, generating new demands. It appears that this trend will continue in the future and it will even be increased. In this sense, although the physical media or traditional media are still being used in ever greater extent, by its inherent advantages, new technologies are widely used (thus, among others, Internet, Bluetooth and SMS/MMS). The technology achieves increasingly social life scenarios (López Jiménez, 2008; López Jiménez, 2009; López Jiménez, 2011; López

Jiménez, 2013; López Jiménez, Redchuk, Dittmar and Vargas-Portillo, 2013). There are very few areas that have not yet reached. In fact, we can say that new technologies have become a very effective ally in every day issues. . Advertising or commercial communication is no exception.

Advertising can be about numerous goods and / or services. Among these, foods aimed at children are included. The latter can be promoted by physical or traditional media, but also through digital channels. While it is true that certain advertising campaigns have the children as main target as foods specifically targeting to them, others can be viewed by the children themselves , without being in any way, specifically channeled to them. Such campaigns sometimes may present harmful content to underage, which may result unfavorably on them (Martín-Casallo López, 2001; De Lama Aymá, 2006).

In the case of food products to children, it must be emphasized that the responsibilities, by entrepreneurs operating in this sector, are higher due to the influence that advertising can play on them.

Although the heteronomous standard (legal regulations passed by the national legislature) is expected to play a central role in all this issue, it should be complemented, not replaced, by the autonomous rules (including the rules which are derived from self-regulation of the codes of conduct). It can be said that this is a time of social reality when it is convenient to have some collaboration between public and private agents (Gómez Segade, 1982; Gómez Castallo, 2002).

Self-regulation, concerning the particular seems plausible. The articulated codes of good practice in this area, s aimed at limiting the exposure of children and youth at advertising, traditional and digital. To this end, we can, for example, cite the actions undertaken in the framework of the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. One of the performances, the code of conduct plays in these issues, codes of conduct play is the education of the recipients. It is desirable that the member companies effectively educate and inform children and young people and their caretakers about the importance of a balanced diet and a healthy and active way of life. There are critical voices raised against the effectiveness of self-regulation in the area of food advertising. The reason is because the self-imposed rules are not always followed by the industry (Kundel, Mckinley and Wright, 2009).

Nowadays, there are four States that have special laws regulating food advertising. In England, the television commercial communications on certain foods which have fat, sugar, salt or which are directed to children under sixteen are prohibited. Ireland limits, significantly, the use of characters in which the child may have placed a special trust and includes the use of certain warnings in advertisements. This last point is also present in the Brazilian legislation. Meanwhile, in the case of France it is mandatory that commercial communication messages are accompanied by nutritional information (Patiño Alvé, 2007).

Ultimately, the legal rules intend to protect the underage in many areas, although it is certainly quite significantly limited and outdated compared to the rapid progress in relation to the new technologies arising, the case of, for example, the Internet. These restrictions are overcome by the use of codes of conduct, as articulated on the protection of minors has a content quite sufficient, in constant and rapid update process, which include food products. Inside the code of conduct that currently prevails in the area that will be addressed, there is one that certainly deserves our attention. We refer to the Spanish PAOS code (code of self-regulation of food advertising to children, obesity prevention and health) (Fernando Magarzo, 2008; Gómez Castallo and Fernando Magarzo, 2011).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To test the importance or value of food advertising aimed at children, parents who had children of school age (4-17 year olds) were surveyed. For the study sample, twenty-six schools (public and private) from six different provinces of Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Zaragoza and Malaga) were chosen, considering its location and recognition. A total of 926 surveys, interviewing parents, randomly were performed under the conditions proposed. We were interested to discuss various topics such as the influence of food advertising companies specifically targeting to children in general and especially those made by those who are committed to respecting the voluntary codes of practice on the subject. Likewise, for the treatment of data, the use of SPSS program was made, so the most appropriate operations in this investigation could be performed.

Exploratory analysis was carried out by using a focus group study, which consisted of an unstructured, open-ended questions, which were formulated to a group of 28 parents from

various schools, the subject of the interview, with the aim of finding the right approach for our research.

Upon completion of this first phase, a conclusive investigation took place, which consisted of a structured direct questionnaire, given the simplicity of use and the easiness with which data can be used for analysis and interpretation. In the descriptive study a questionnaire format that prioritized the use of multiple-choice and dichotomous questions was used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Food advertising aimed at children is received by different communication channels. Although such ads still predominate in physical or traditional channels-television, radio, national newspapers, magazines aimed at adults, publications specifically aimed at children, some ads are beginning to be developed in Internet, digital media, bluetooth and SMS/MMS. In this respect, the questioning about what means more commercial communications for foods for minors receive was made. Television accounted for 57 %, magazines aimed at adults 10%, 8% referred to publications specifically designed for children and 3% to national newspapers. Now, new technologies, as noted, are gaining ground. In fact, in our study, it was estimated that this type of communication seemed to be receiving under progressively more digital media. Internet reaches 17 %, so it would be the second mean after television occupying 3% of the text messages and multimedia sent to mobile phones or tablets that integrate the SIM card. Finally, only 2% of the total estimated food communications were received under bluetooth.

To calculate the importance that parents or guardians attributed to the fact that the company respected in their communications the legal regulations we used a nonparametric method deployed to measure quality (Cabello, Conde, Diego, Moguerza y Redchuk, 2012). The 97% considered it positive, while 3 % considered it not relevant.

A major issue for food advertising aimed at children is the implementation of standards of conduct that improve the legal regulations. As noted, they are a clear commitment to quality.

In this regard, two sets of questions to parents of children enrolled in schools of twenty six provinces of Spain were conducted. With the first set, the effects that represents the

membership of the company to a code of conduct unilaterally created and verified by itself was searched. With the second set, the consequences presenting adherence to a code of conduct on the same issue (food advertising aimed at children) written by a third party and also its eventual failure verified by an external agency were investigated.

First, respondents (parents with children under 18 years of age) were asked about their attitudes regarding to companies that had advertised in some media and showed the fulfilment of its own code of conduct. As shown in Figure 1, 44.3 % of the respondents considered that respecting its own code of conduct positively influenced in the acquisition of a company's product. 42.1% of the respondents reported not knowing which is the adherence to a code of good practices unilaterally, they did not know what it was, while 13.6 % said they did not care whether or not a company respected a certain set of rules that had been previously imposed by itself - in other words they were indifferent, so it did not influence in any way in their buying decision. The fact that more than 4 in 10 parents estimated relevant that the food company is engaged with a code of good practice draws our attention. Now, given that this is a relatively recent figure, still a group of people do not know what they represent (and therefore its effectiveness cannot be estimated), and for others and various reasons, their happening is indifferent. The latter, representing more than 55 % of the respondent group.

Table (1).- The influence of food publicity aimed at children by companies which respect the codes of conduct established unilaterally (nonparametric method).

Influence	
Indifferent	13.6%
Positively	44.3%
Not knowing	42.1%

As for codes of conduct that are not unilateral, also deserved our attention. We refer to codes of conduct that have been developed by a third party who also have a party in charge of verification in case of default. This type of instruments based on self-regulation, also deserves a positive assessment by the parents of the children interviewed. In this regard, 46% stated it was important for them, 40% indicated that they did not know what it

was, and finally 14% were indifferent. The results derived in this respect were similar to the previous case. However, it should be pointed out the fact that adherence to a code of good practice of this type, is more important to a greater extent than unilateral. In fact, this slight increase may reflect that, being developed by a different company and being controlled by a specific body, hold a higher degree of credibility.

To better understand the response of the attitudes of parents involved in the study, the results were compared according to the level of education they had achieved. Among the companies that follow a code of conduct (unilateral and prepared by a third party), it was found that there was a significant proportion of parents with college degrees who, by the way, cared that the food company that promoted its products targeted to children were adhered to a code of good practice. As can be seen in Figure 2, the parents who felt that they cared that the company was adhering to a code of conduct and actually culminated college was 32.4%. The ones who had not completed but had begun were 28.3 %. The percentage of parents who themselves had completed high school rose to 21.6%, and in contrast, those who had never finished high school reached to 9.2 % of the total. In the case of parents who had only performed primary or less education, the number was only 8.5%.

Table (2).- Education of parents who were surveyed regarding the relevance of codes of conduct in advertising food aimed at children.

Education of parents	
Primary or less	8.5%
Not completed high school	9.2%
High school	21.6%
Not completed college	28.3%
College	32.4%

The derived results showed that those who had higher studies, graduated, had given more importance to the implementation of codes of conduct, then, somehow, they assumed a greater commitment to certain quality standards as being an improvement of child custody of underage group. Higher education, greater the value given to adherence to codes of

conduct in this field.

Finally, those parents who cared about the presence of a code of conduct, were also questioned about the level of knowledge they had about them. So, they were asked which of a set of them were better known. Thus, the ones mentioned on the issue discussed were the ones which existed in Spain, other European countries, the U.S. and other Latin American countries. Since the empirical study was focused on Spain, the majority of parents who positively valued adherence to a code of conduct, (85 %) knew the code of practice developed in Spain, the PAOS code. Only 5% reported to have knowledge of the codes of conduct of the United States and 7% of those from Latin America, and 3% of those from other European countries. Those who responded affirmatively to the query of whether they knew the PAOS code were asked if they could discern differences with their counterparts. Interestingly enough, only 5 % of them said to know such distinctive differences.

4. CONCLUSION

Advertising can be about numerous goods and / or services. Among these, foods aimed at children are included. The latter can be promoted by physical or traditional media, but also through digital channels. While it is true that certain advertising campaigns have children as their main target, as are foods specifically targeting to them, others can be viewed by the children themselves , without being in any way, specifically channeled to them. Such campaigns sometimes may present harmful content to children, which may result unfavorably on them. In the case of food products to children, it must be emphasized that the responsibilities, by entrepreneurs operating in this sector are higher due to the influence that advertising can play on them. To increase the quality standards in commercial communications, some companies have decided, voluntarily, to adhere to codes of practice. As discussed, they represent a significant improvement of the legal regulations. According to the empirical study conducted, the commitment which involves adherence to a code of conduct, should be welcomed as it represents a competitive advantage over other potential competitors. Regarding well known codes of conduct, to date, on the subject, in the case of Spain, the country where the empirical study was carried out, the so called PAOS code is highlighted.

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