# FOOD-RELATED TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN

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**Abstract**
During our research, we examined how often do children and teenagers sit down in front of television screens and thus come into contact with television advertisements and the sales promotion tools often used by corporations. We mostly placed emphasis on brand-related cartoon characters used by corporations. In the case of children, we can say that an appropriately made combination of a well-placed cartoon character, logo and colors has a notable influence. Not only they recognize brands easier with the help of these, they also trigger emotional attachment. All of these contribute to the development of brand loyalty, which if develops during childhood, can last an entire lifetime.

**Keywords:**  Kids, television advertisements, figures, cartoon characters, sales promotion tools, food, brands

**Introduction**
Children and teenagers became the prime target audience for advertisements in the 21st century. They became the ones whom corporations try to coerce with advertisements, exploiting their verdancy and undeveloped preference systems. This effect is upped by the fact that nowadays children often watch television programmes without their parents, not infrequently on their own television in their room without any parental control. The target audience of children and teenagers is especially receptive to all kinds of novelty, especially if we serve these to them with colorful and clamorous advertisements. Of course, corporations also know this, and they target the most suggestive age ranges who have no income of their own.
In recent decades, thanks to our globalized and busy world, - among many other things – childhood also went through tremendous changes. According to media theorist NEIL POSTMAN, childhood practically ceased

to exist: „whereby the home and school lost their commanding place as regulators of child development; whereby information became uncontrollable began with the telegraph" (POSTMAN, 1983). This is even more true as of nowadays, because nothing seems to halt the searing of technology. Children are born almost with mobile phone and remote control in their hands. This is proven by KidComm's research, according to which it can be said that most children's very first own technical device is the mobile phone. This means that 59% of children own a mobile phone, while 50% of them own a television (KIDCOMM, 2014). From this stems the unsurprising fact that the currently growing generation is under the effect of mass media devices and thus advertisements to a great extent. The youth are uncontrollably bombarded with various advertisements on a daily basis. According to the advertising researches of Nielsen, it can be said that the average daily appearance of advertisements is 9268 ads, which comes out to 3382935 ads if we extrapolate it to a full year. (NIELSEN 2014)

Advertisements shape not only needs, wants, but also frames of mind. Thus media is among the most important socializing tool next to families, schools and reference groups. The number of advertisements aimed specifically at children in TV and other media is rising in the frame of these tools. The children are manipulated and captivated by colorful pictures and soothing sounds. For children audience to properly interpret the advertisements, all of these need to be debated and made up during preparation work. This preparation work has to specifically touch upon how children contrast advertisements; how they interpret advertisement images, how they project them, and what do they take from advertisements for shaping their own personality.

The majority of underage people are unable to tell the difference between advertisements and programmes, especially when people known from movies, series and TV-shows appear in them. Children start to recognize ads from the age of 9. They try to focus on the point objectively, critically, with a sharp eye and without bias. During this they begin to gain the skill of discerning between reality and fiction.  (MÜLLER, 2001).

Advertisements are trying to use more and more aggressive and subtle tools to control children. Marketing strategists are being more and more sophisticated in order to reach more young customers. Nowadays customers aren't choosing products and services as much as brands. They are looking for the promise of usefulness, expectable quality, belonging to groups or the lifestyle, „trend" embodied by the brand of certain products (VERES, SZILÁGYI 2009). Thus the base of a brand's goodwill value is the goodwill value of the customer. To this end, the focus of marketing needs to be on increasing the lifespan of the loyal consumer, and one of the most important tools for this is brand cultivation (KOTLER 1998). We can see

from this that shaping a good brand is not only giving a name and making it known via various advertisement- and other communication tools, it is much more than that: a good brand represents the value it wants to offer to the buyers from the vendor's offerings. This is exactly why brand politics are among the most important tools in the competition for buyers (REKETTYE 2009).  Thus the corporation needs to be aware of its brand's value. The brand as a capital is born in the minds, namely with the help of emotional experiences, by rationing pictures, music, smell and experiences, without overburdening the consumer with text. All of these tools are integrated into brand communication. Nowadays brands can be barely made only based on quality; quality is standard and is not adequate as a reason for purchase. Brands need experience dimension to physically differentiate themselves from the increasingly similar competition (MAGYAR MARKTING SZÖVETSÉG 2011). This positioning process needs to be already made conscious in child consumers.

   In the case of children and teenagers - similarly to adults - brand judgment is based on values represented by the brand. Children are already able to identify a brand from shapes, colors and sounds at the age of 3. This means that logos, packaging and various signals play an important role, especially if their target audience is the age range of children (MÜLLER 2001). An especially important role is played by colors, shapes and sounds. There were a plethora of experiments in the matter of various colors evoking different emotions among consumers. The only thing that turned out of these measurements is that there are warm and cold color associations. Thus it occurs that the yellow color is always warm, exciting, and is always evoking a warm, friendly atmosphere. Red is the color of passion and it stirs up emotions. In contrast, blue evokes the feelings of calmness and peace. At the same time, it can be considered as the color of dreams and unattainable unrealistic distances. The color green, which is a mix between blue and yellow, is the most pleasant for the eyes and the nerves. Thus it comes that it has a soothing effect, especially on tired people. These statements in regards to colors are true not only of adults, but are especially true in the case of children. Hence advertisement designers try to cleverly use these meanings and the most eye-catching colors to affect customers. There is a high rate of recollection in advertisement psychology for shapes and in our case, logos. This has several conditions: by all means, we have to pay attention to transparency, briefness and ease of remembering. These increase the message's resistance to environmental noise. (SAS 2007)

   Children are born almost right into the world of brands. They start sticking to a few brands, which often go with them along their entire life. It follows that the majority of youngsters can recite 700 brands with little to no effort. But we still can't explain why some brands can be passed on through

generations while others are forgotten in a short time. Children are shaping the trends and they let trends to be fed to them. (MÜLLER 2001). They express this in their preferences, because it is frequent that the child isn't asking for a product, but is asking for a specific brand. (he doesn't want chocolate, he wants Milka). This statement is proven to be true not only in our country, but also worldwide.

For advertising specialists, using cartoon stars is beneficial from several aspects. On the one hand its costs are low, and on the other hand it is much easier to attach to a product and identify that with it. This is especially true if they target the children and teenagers with the product, because the familiar figures, the so-called characters influence them in an imperative mood. (TÖRŐCSIK 2011). Considering this, several corporations either use an own „character" or ask already familiar fairytale characters to advertise their products. An example of this is the youth recruiter, Ronald clown from 1963, who has been the infamous character of McDonald's ever since. The restaurant can be immediately recognized, thanks to the clown. Even if the child can't read or speak yet, thanks to the clown, he will immediately know that he sees a McDonald's, which is for the children. Of course, the clown is dressed in the colors of the restaurant, which strengthens affiliation and the brand.

Manufacturing companies are willing to do a lot of things for the sake of success, even „marrying" to other companies. The co-operation between Disney and McDonald's came into fruition in this way. During the decade-long co-operation of the two mega-corporations, millions of Disney toys accompanied the Happy Meal menus (MAGYAR MARKETING SZÖVETSÉG, 2011). On the whole, we can say that these co-operations work, but are at the same time risky, because the brands advertised together coalesce for the consumers. Fairy tale characters and celebrities considerably help the identification of brands. We can state that the use of cartoon and fairytale characters became one, if not the best manipulation tool in the case of children. These characters unambiguously help the marketability of the products. The sequence turned around. Children are not buying the product; instead they are buying the character that can be found on or next to the product. Pleasure factor isn't connected to the product itself, but to the character. (SZŰCS 2010)

## Aim and Methodology

We made a primary research based on secondary information. In this a central focus was on cartoon characters, colors, slogans and signals found in television advertisements. The research was carried out in two steps, between 2014. 03. 20. and 2014. 09. 15. As part of the research, we did a survey and a focus group monitoring. The research was done in Hungary,

more specifically in the town of Gyöngyös in Heves County, thus the results are not representative as a whole. Nevertheless, the discovered results provide us with useful data. The survey was filled out by 212 children between ages 8 and 11. Due to their ages, questioning was done with paper questionnaires. 114 girls and 98 boys took part in the research. Regarding their ages, 11,8% of them were 8, 29,9% were 9, 49,5% were 10 and 9,4% were 11 years old. The focus group-based questioning made it possible to get information that couldn't have been gotten with a paper-based survey. 15 children took part in this phase in groups of 3. Research data was analyzed with computer, using SPSS 14.0 software, Microsoft Excel 2007 and a word cloud method, using mathematical and statistic processes.

**Results**

During the research, an important factor was that how often and how regularly do the children sit down in front of the television screens, because the higher this rate is, the higher the probability of them encountering various advertisements. After examining this, we can say that they spend a maximum of 2-3 hours in front of the TV on weekdays, which can even near double amounts on weekends. The reason for this is that they spend most of their weekdays in school, thus they have less free time to watch television.

If they are sitting in front of the television, they mostly watch channels where cartoons and children's films are being aired, thus they stick to children's stories and their heroes. The importance of tales for children is that they carry important ancient plots to which they can easily relate to. They can broaden their reality and use them for problem-solving. Children's stories help them to adapt and ease tensions. Thus these stories show the various stages of the soul's development in powerful symbolic pictures (ANYAMENTŐ 2014). The stories that interest children the most are those that entertain them and pique their interests (BETTELHEIM 2013). Advertising specialists kept all of this in mind when they started to use the so-called merchandising with the point of using already familiar personalities, characters, signs in a way that helps shaping the advertiser's image. The benefit of this method is that merchandising already possesses some positive information, thus its use result in some plus trustfulness, by which it piques interest much more easily towards the advertised product or service. Merchandising is essentially the transfer of image. This means using well-known and familiar persons (Alain Delon, Jürgen Klinsmann etc.), imaginary and visually embodied characters (James Bond, Kojak, Batman, Superman etc.), cartoon and children's story characters (Tom and Jerry) in goods traffic.

A huge benefit of image transfer is that consumers accept the aforementioned well-known characters as distinctive signs or brand names.

They are suitable for gaining attention, persuading customers and boosting sales. (TATTAY 1999). During our research we asked the children in a playful way to connect the various logos and cartoon characters to their respective products.

**Figure 1.:** Brand identification of children based on logo and brand
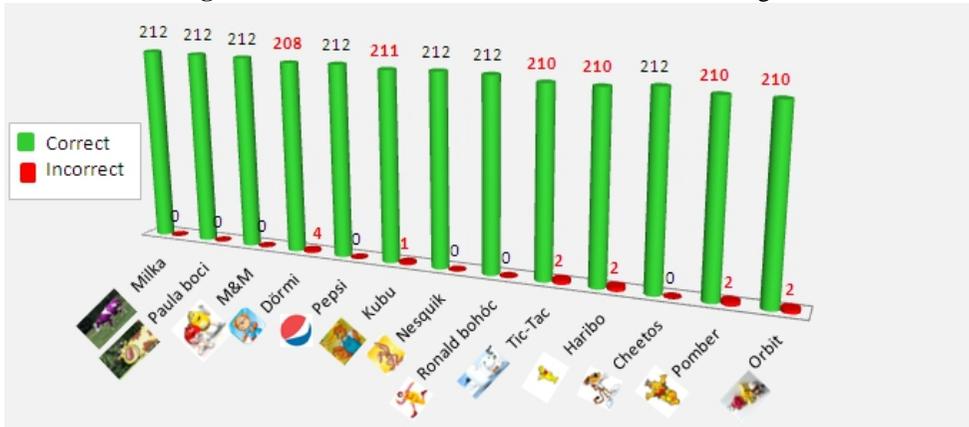


Source: Own research 2014

Based on the „knowledge" of the 212 children who had filled out the survey, we can say that brand recognition skills of children in the 8-11 age group is exceptionally good. They assigned the given brand representations to their respective products with a 99,9% success (correct answer) rate.

We make the conclusion on this basis that a properly selected character and logo can easily reach the children with the help of advertisements. At the same time, the target audience of a given corporation is important, too. They need to build their product's branding based on this; we filled out this same questionnaire with adults during a non-representative surveying. The results were shocking, because they are in stark contrast to the children's answers. Namely, adults could only identify every third brand by the advertising characters. A reason for this may be that the primary target audiences for our examined products are children, not adults.
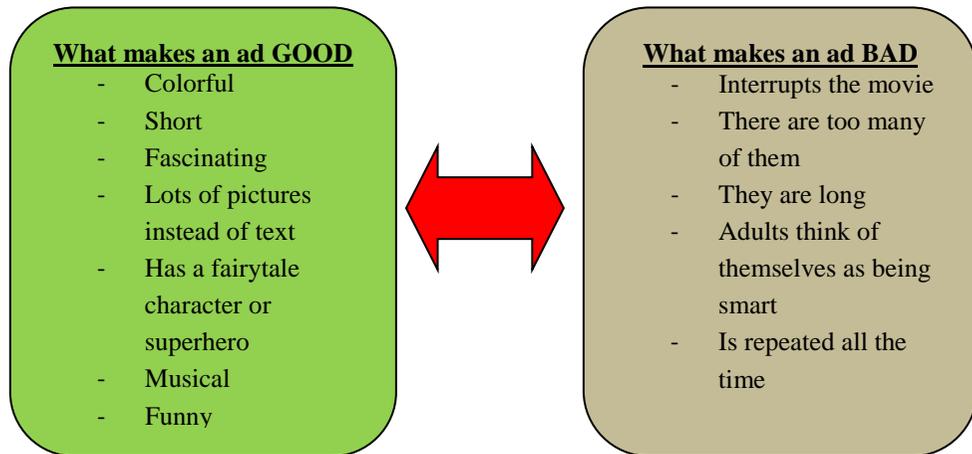
**Table 1.:** Judgment of ads based on age

| Variable | | How old are you? | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | |
| I find advertisements colorful and funny | not at all | 3 | 5 | 19 | **12** | 39 |
| | not really | 8 | 12 | 19 | 0 | 39 |
| | partially | **10** | 16 | **38** | 6 | 70 |
| | mostly yes | 2 | 9 | 17 | 0 | 28 |
| | solutely yes | 2 | **20** | 12 | 2 | 36 |
| Total | | 25 | 62 | 105 | 20 | 212 |

Source: Own research 2014

We can say based on Table 1 that age groups 8 and 10 find the advertisements partially funny and colorful, and oppositely in the case of the 9 year olds, 20 out of 62 find advertisements to indeed be funny and colorful. For age group 11 which is represented the least in the sample, more than 50% pf the respondents don't find advertisements to be colorful and entertaining at all. According to the Cramer criterion, the correlation number between the two criteria (advertisements are funny, colorful, and the age of respondents) is only 0,272. Based on this, results are quite heterogeneous: there is no close relation between the respondent children's ages and the judgment of advertisements.

Following this we were eager to know what makes an advertisement "good" or "bad" according to children.

**Figure 2. :** What makes a television ad good or bad according to children



| What makes an ad GOOD | What makes an ad BAD |
|---|---|
| - Colorful<br>- Short<br>- Fascinating<br>- Lots of pictures instead of text<br>- Has a fairytale character or superhero<br>- Musical<br>- Funny | - Interrupts the movie<br>- There are too many of them<br>- They are long<br>- Adults think of themselves as being smart<br>- Is repeated all the time |

Source: Own research 2014

We can clearly see the opposites on Figure 2, according to which short ads are good, and too long ones are bad. Children still think that those ads are good in which primarily children, cartoon characters and superheroes dominate instead of adults. With regular repeats, ads get stuck in children's heads, but they lose their novelty because of this, becoming boring to children. After we had examined the usage of positive properties, let's examine which ads adhered to these criteria and became favorite of children.

**Figure 3.:** Favorite television ads of children



Source: Own research 2014

We can see on Figure 3, that food advertisements are among the favorite advertisements of children, and at the same time toy advertisements are among them too, such as the LEGO advertisement. But still the most beloved turned out to be the advertisement for the Jófogás classified advertisement web site (which is a special ad film, in which a plush figure appears). Paula's pudding, Milka and Coca-Cola ads received exceptionally positive results. By examining the most beloved advertisements, we came to the conclusion that children can best relate to advertisements in which familiar children's story or imaginary characters appear, because all of the aforementioned advertisements have such characters; Paula is a singing cow, Milka is a purple cow, and in the Jófogás advertisement we meet Zsozsó. The only exception where we don't meet such or a similar character is still among the children's favourite. This is the Coca-Cola ad. In this case the emotional attachment and evoked feelings helped this ad to take its place among children's favorites.

During our research we grouped children and teenagers based on their answers. According to the results of cluster analysis, children's attitude to advertisements can be studied in 4 segments:

- Member of Segment 1: finds advertisements to be funny and entertaining, thus they are not annoyed by them. According to their telling they often buy things by the influence of advertisements. Among these products we can obviously find sweets and soft drinks. According to their views advertisements not only affect their purchases, but they affect people's purchases in general. Members of this segment are 21,7% (46 children) of the full sample.

- Member of Segment 2: they find that there are funny and colorful advertisements and at the same time, there are the opposite (boring) advertisemenents, too. According to them, the television advertisements generally affect the majority of people, but they are an exception to this, because they don't do their purchased on the influence of advertisements. Members of this segment are 35,8% of the full sample, which equals 76 children.
- Member of Segment 3: they can be said to be repulsive, as they consider advertisements to be completely annoying. They don't consider them to be either colorful or entertaining. They unambiguously deny the fact that advertisements have a manipulative effect. This is well-illustrated by them saying their shopping habits aren't influenced by advertisements, and they consider this to be true to people in general. 26%, 55 children from the sample share this view with one another.
- Member of Segment 4: they find ads to be mildly entertaining and funny, but irrespectively of this and similarly to Segment 3 members, they find advertisements to be annoying, even if this rejection is not as strong as members of Segment 3. They don't argue against the manipulative effects of advertisements, and according to them, their shopping habits are a bit more influenced by ads than people in general. This segment is the smallest in the sample, of which they are 16,5%, counting 35 children.

Segments are exemplified by Figure 4.

**Figure 4.:** Figure of cluster analysis
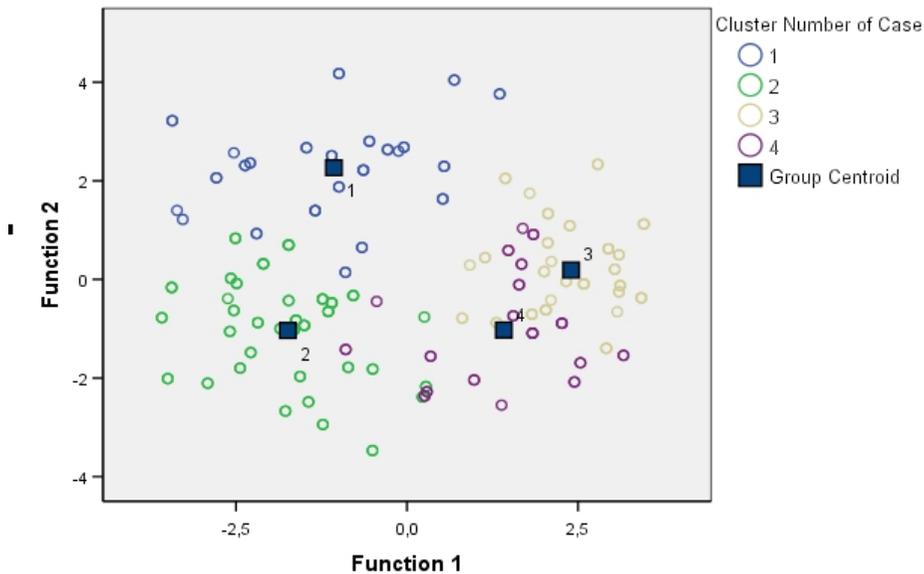


Source: Own research 2014

Time spent with watching television is important in respect to this study, because the more time they spend in front of TV screens, the higher the chance of them repeatedly encountering advertisements. The figure seems to be quite good in spite of the small sample size, because Function1 explains 56,7% of variance, while Function2 explains 30,1% of variance. Cumulating these it is 86,8%, thus Function3 would only explain 13,2%.

**Conclusion**

The age group of children and teenagers are an essential segment for market participants, as they are there not only as independent customers, advisors and manipulators of parents, but they will be the customers of the future. This is exactly why most corporations focus their activities on this age range. They are exceptionally gullible, suggestible due to their youth and they don't possess own, developed values, thus corporations are able to tailor children's values and customer-consumer habits to their own needs. The usage of advertisements helps in this.

Thanks to the sped-up technological development children can be increasingly reached with the help of the new tools, such as the internet. Next to the internet, television also plays an important role in their lives. The majority of school-children spend an average of 2 hours in front of the TV per weekday, which can reach the double on weekends. So long as they sit in front of TV sets, manufacturers have the chance of manipulating them. While a majority of children can't differentiate between advertisements and programmes, corporations don't want to take any chances, thus they are inclined to use sales promotion tools, such as familiar persons appearing in advertisements, emblematic cartoon characters attached to brands or sticker albums and "gotta catch'em all" sales. These sales promotion tools are mostly successful both as a tool for brand identification and encouragement of purchases. It is really important to protect children from the dangers of advertisements. The question arises: how far can parental responsibility reach, and when do we need to intervene with laws to protect the children? In our country they tried using several different laws to push back advertisements targeting and deceiving children. In my opinion, the success of these heavily depends on parental rearing and care.

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