TV programming for consumers in miniature. Advertising for young children that speaks the language of adults

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Taking as our point of departure the fact that, increasingly, the line that separates the world of young children from that of adults is practically inexistent, this article investigates how advertising helps to turn young children into adults and, inversely, helps to infantilise those who have gone way beyond adolescence. The text analyses the parallelisms and divergences between the creative strategies used in advertisements aimed at young children and those aimed at an adult audience in order to discover how advertising uses resources to catch the attention of young children, who are actually the potential consumers of the future.

Keywords

Advertising, television, young children, consumption, effects.

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1. Introduction

In 1982, a lecturer from New York University suddenly shook up the consciences of millions of people around the world proclaiming the disappearance of childhood. By means of his book of the same name, Neil Postman launched a warning cry, pointing out the shortfalls in the dominant socialisation processes of young children at that time and the harmful effects of the progressive elimination of the frontiers between the infant and adult world.

Almost a quarter of a century later, reality has exceeded Postman's prophecy several times over. Although traditionally, in the words of the same author, young children were a group of people who did not know certain adult things, this statement has now become almost ridiculous, as children's free access to society through the media (particularly television and new technologies) has helped to totally eliminate any lack of knowledge of the world of "grown-ups".

The frontiers between the infant and adult world have therefore become increasingly more vague. We should not be surprised that the consumerist tendencies of the youngest pre-adolescents coincide substantially not only with those of adolescents but also with those of the adult target. Clothes, music, food... everything is for everyone. Multi-segmentation down to the minimum essence has given way to consumption in its maximum expression.

The competition between advertisers to reach the end consumer starts right at the time when, in addition to defining the core target, adjacent targets are also established, potential buyers to be reached by means of creative strategies that, although designed for a specific target group, end up having an impact on others. So while the discourse capable of seducing both young and old is growing non-stop, and with all the consequences this entails, advertising rhetoric aimed exclusively at young children is going through a slump.

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2. From child viewer to child consumer

Towards the end of the nineties, computers started to be installed in homes and shared with television the role of the nanny of the future: an apparently inanimate being that, after pressing a simple button, was capable of telling incredible stories, of transporting young viewers to the other side of the world, of connecting them with other people with the same concerns assaulting their infant universes and, in short, replacing the role of the primary mentor, reserved until now for parents and which, over a short period of time, has turned into an increasingly accelerated socialisation process.

In amidst all this replacement process, advertising took advantage of this gap to take up its place in this parallel world, taking on the role of advisory mother that, given the absence of a real mother, started to guide young children as to what was good for their growth, for their leisure time and even for their education. By means of repetition, animated characters and recreations of situations familiar to their young viewers, adverts transformed the "child viewer" into "child consumer" using a process that various authors have agreed to call the "corporate construction of childhood".[1]

In fact, as noted by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003:438), studies on the effects of advertising on children are based on two differentiated paradigms: the paradigm of the *empowered child* and that of the *vulnerable child*.[2] In the first, the *empowered child*, the child is seen as a born consumer, capable of critically processing advertising messages. Research based on this paradigm is founded on aspects such as children's marketing, brand attitude, brand image and intention to buy. On the other hand, in research based on the paradigm of the *vulnerable child*, the effects of advertising assume that children lack the cognitive defences to protect themselves from adverts' messages.

Although based on the premise that children are particularly sensitive to certain stimuli, especially those with a high emotional content, the paradigm of the *vulnerable child* studies the disregarded effects of advertising, those ignored by communication theories. In other words the indirect effects, such as family conflict as a result of unsatisfied demands, an increase in materialism or unhappiness in children caused by these situations, among others.

Judith Van Evra (1990:229) talks, in this respect, of a kind of "unseen presence" that guides children in the most critical years. Coinciding with pre-adolescence and adolescence, advertising instils values, generates needs and ends up making children inexhaustible consumers:

"As the child grows up she/he moves through several phases before eventually becoming an independent consumer. Each of these developmental stages is seen as critical for early learning and lays the foundation for life-long education. The advertiser, like the parent and the schoolteacher, can influence the entire process by which a child learns to establish consumption related values, sets priorities and develops aspirations. Like an unseen presence, advertising is always there, invisibly guiding the child in these critical, formative years. During infancy the child is principally an information receiver. Advertising selects the information and ideas which will promote a certain kind of consciousness in the child."

To this fact we must also add children's growing buying power. In order for their children to learn how to handle money, many parents assign them a fixed amount of money, so they can buy directly without involving their parents. So the concept mentioned above of the child as viewer becoming the child as consumer becomes even more of an absolute reality.

As stated by Ana Isabel Romero (1991:3),[3] advertising, consumption and socialisation are three elements that cannot be taken separately today:

"The process of initiation and consumption in children occurs, in our opinion, at the same time as the process of socialisation, being the first objects consumed by the infant, of an oral nature, and their request and enjoyment

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1 Schor, J. B. "Corporate Construction of Chilhood" (CCC), 2004.

2 Buijzen M.; Valkenburg, P. M. "Empowered child" and "vulnerable" child (2003: 438).

3 *Revista de consumo y sociedad*, no. 9, 1991.

being directly related to the sequential phase in their parental relationship. Toys, originally of religious symbolism as a possessed object, are implanted later, and from here on they are introduced with access to what is symbolic of the value of money, as well as adapting group and generational codes in choosing the objects to be consumed."

Based on the combination of these three aspects and the fact that young children have a certain buying power, their role in the commercial universe is therefore no longer limited to that of consumer but is multiplied by three, a diversification that is widely taken advantage of by advertising strategies.

From our point of view, therefore, children develop three differentiated roles that also converge in their immediate environment:

1. **Buyer:** using the small amount of money they have, children make certain purchases, on their own initiative or following advice from relatives.
2. **Influencer:** based on advertising, young children ask their parents for certain products. So children act as a direct influence on family purchases or on those for which they are the direct recipients. This role is particularly strong in food products, which end up being consumed by the whole family, as well as in toys or personal objects to be used by the child.
3. **Consumer:** a situation that occurs in concordance or not with the two previous roles. Children can become buyers and consumers, or influencers and consumers, or all three at the same time: buyers, influencers and consumers. It will all ultimately depend on their buying power.

Whatever the case, the reality is that advertising plays a fundamental part in any of these roles, so that adverts can have great influence on the formation of children as consumers.

As revealed in a study carried out by the French government in 2002,[4] there are few parents, or perhaps practically no parents, who recommend you should resist the demands of child consumption or the influence of children on family purchases (2002:53).

Connected to this idea, Norminanda Montoya (2007:12) uses an Anglo Saxon term to describe the detonator that, due to pure exhaustion, leads parents to buy what children ask for. "Finally, children [...] are not only voracious consumers of adverts but it is said that they also influence most of the family consumption via the technique of badgering their mother in the supermarket to get her to buy something. It's what North American experts call the *nag factor*." According to the author, although scientifically it's difficult to prove that advertising influences children to the point of their consumer behaviour being the result of seeing the adverts, advertising spend aimed at young children is rising non-stop, just in case

In this respect, it should be added that, coinciding with Jean Noël Kapferer (1985), advertising is not the only source to incite child consumption but other external influences also need to be taken into account, such as peer groups. Actually, these peer groups accentuate the effect of advertising. All friends have to do is say something positive about a product at school for it to become an object desired by the young consumer, irrespective of whether the advertising has been seen or not. This desire is also multiplied with the advertising stimulus, which merely reinforces the positive opinion the child already had of the product *a priori*.

As the child approaches the adolescent age group, demand by the child consumer decreases or rather evolves towards other, more subtle forms. We might say that requests to the parents, the influence exercised by the child on the adult purchasing process, either for own consumption or not, change their form. Verbal insistence on the acquisition of certain products becomes dialogue: the child tries to convince his or her parents of the benefits of buying or consuming the product. Kapferer (1985:118) explains this process as part of the cognitive evolution of children.

It should therefore be noted that, with age, consumerist desire does not disappear but becomes more balanced and evolves towards other products. So the frontiers between childhood and the adult world are increasingly less defined and young children's consumerist trends end up coinciding with those of adults. Advertisers, aware of this change, emit

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4   *Les enfants et la publicité télévisée. Approche synthétique et perspectives critiques.* París: La documentation française, 2002.

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their subjugating sirens' song in the form of a creative strategy capable of captivating, with their harmonies, the Ulysses of any age, sex or condition.

3. Young children and the language of advertising

With the collapse of the wall separating adult from child consumption, advertising discourse has become simplified in terms of form. Although the basis of the message aims to reach a specific target group, the creative formulas used are actually so universal, so intentionally simple, that they end up hitting the rest of the audience, the adjacent audiences. It is therefore not difficult for young children to know, word by word, the jingle for the latest campaign for a well-known beer brand or to describe to perfection the plan established by cereals for their consumers to lose weight before the summer arrives.

Music, colours, image movement, sex or humour, among others, are some of these elements that are recurrent and absolutely effective in reaching any kind of target. For this reason, and going back to the idea that "everything is for everyone", creative resources aimed exclusively at a child target are under-used at present.

A study carried out between January and June 2004[5] showed that adverts broadcast during advertising slots within the children's broadcasting band did not talk in children's language. Violence, adultification of very young children's behaviour and the use of resources often present in spots aimed at adults (rhymes, music, metaphors, etc.) have ended up distancing the possibility of developing a suitable discourse for minors.

This analysis led us to conclude that, currently, the creative resources of language for children's' advertising that are used practically exclusively are as follows:
- Magic realism: the use of fantasy as a persuasive strategy
- Game as an argument: promotional gifts associated with the purchase

- The dual fragmentation of reality: a search for meaning in advertising discourse
- The exacerbated use of special effects

3.1. Magic realism: the use of fantasy as a persuasive strategy

Since time immemorial, advertising and myth have gone together and have created their own language capable of catching the attention of the target and of seducing him or her. Myth constantly peppers the advertising of our days: Narcissus or the young man in love with his own image, Venus/Aphrodite or the goddess of beauty... Although myth is present throughout advertising, it is undoubtedly in adverts aimed at children and pre-adolescents where fantasy, magic and myth are shown more explicitly to awaken the target's curiosity.

In fact, unlike most advertising spots aimed at adults, a large part of the adverts whose target is children adopt a fable-like physiognomy, in which good actions are closely related to using the product and negative acts to not consuming the object being advertised. Curiously, in French, the fable genre is called *conte d'avertissement*, with an extremely similar etymology to the English term *advertisement*.

Another point of contact between the fable genre and advertising aimed at young children is the use of repetition as a reminder which, on the one hand, allows recipients to assimilate all the information they receive about the fantastic story and, on the other hand, manages to fix the product in the children's minds so that it forms part of their particular *shortlist*.

Chalvon *et al.* agree on highlighting the importance of repetition, materialised in the slogan to penetrate young children (1982:174):

"We know how children like advertisements. From the time they are very young, they sing them aloud and repeat the slogans. They are tailor-made to their preferences. The brevity of the intervention suits the child's attention span, not very inclined to be interested in extensive developments. The repetition of an advert day after day

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5 Jiménez Morales, M. "De l'estereotip adult a la realitat preadolescent. Influència de la publicitat en els trastorns del comportament alimentari en nens i nenes de 8 a 12 anys". (Doctoral thesis, Barcelona 2006).

soon becomes a game: the child plays at remembering the continuation of the story. The broadcast becomes a ritual and provides, every day, the same expected pleasure savoured in advance. The insistent rhythm stimulates their imagination and disconcerts them, proposing at the same time a story simplified in the extreme and one that is, therefore, very easy to understand."

The authors also point out how words are used for the images in advertising aimed at children, to make them believe the product will be capable of leading them to the magical world revealed by the multicolour scenes that invade television sets during the advertising break. On the other hand, in spots aimed at an adult target, the images are strong enough to take the viewer to fantastic worlds. The incursion of textual discourse in developing the iconic formula would be interpreted by adults as something implausible or, directly, as a total lack of credibility.

With regard to the language used in advertising aimed at preadolescents, Francesca Romana Puggelli (2002:92) highlights the animism of the discourse used, both at an iconic and textual level. For Puggelli, making inanimate objects come alive is the basis of fantasy, a totally necessary component in advertising spots for this sector of the population.

This incursion of animism in advertising aimed at children is clearly related to the fact that, as revealed by Jean Piaget[6] (1929), until they reach puberty, young children are not capable of differentiating living objects from inanimate things. According to Piaget, children's thought continues to be animist up to adolescence. Although adults explain that things cannot feel nor act, and no matter how hard they try to convince themselves of the truth of this statement in order to please adults, and to avoid ridicule, children are absolutely convinced of the validity of their own ideas.

It is precisely at this point where the figure of what we will call the "magic helper" appears with all intensity. As its name suggests, the "magic helper" is a fantastic element that helps the protagonists of the action to get out of a critical situation. This assistant can be the product itself, which gives strength to the protagonist to achieve his or her goals or transforms him or her into what he/she has always wanted to be. Another possibility is that it is an animated element, such as a pet that talks or an object that infuses the hero with enough courage to achieve his goals. The "magic helper" actually becomes an example of prosopopoeia taken to the extreme.

Along the lines of Piaget, Judith Van Evra (1990:28) highlights the dependence of children in preadolescence with regard to the fantasy that impregnates advertising spots. For the author, children are fascinated by the messages addressed to them by these objects that, during the advertising breaks of their favourite programmes, talk to them of fantastic worlds where they will find products that will turn them into heroes or princesses, into internationally famous sports people or actors. Far from causing incredulity, and thanks to the advertising, these animated objects reaffirm children's beliefs regarding their perception of objects.

3.2. Game as argument: promotional gifts associated with the purchase

The relationship between advertisements and games is repeatedly taken advantage of by advertising creatives when structuring arguments in favour of the products they are promoting. The fun component is in the front line of the stimuli provided to children to incite them to buy or ask for different goods.

As we have already explained, mascots associated with the products and guaranteed or possible gifts linked to purchase are two persuasive elements that have grown significantly over the last few years.

In this way, in line with M. Alonso *et al.* (1995:111), we can say that, when the product is presented, evident dynamic, complicit and fun elements are included, as well as reinforcing the brand image by means of the mascot that represents it and the gift accompanying it:

"In advertising aimed directly at children, as potential buyers, as requesters or advisors of the purchase, games, fun and competitiveness (being strong, being the best or having what others don't have) are the mechanisms most

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6 Piaget concedes different states to children's animist thought up to the adolescent stage in *The Child's Concept of the World*. New York: Brace, 1929.

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frequently employed. And a gift, additional but inseparable to the product (also related to the game in almost all cases) appears as a strong means of appeal."

In fact, product as game is one of the persuasive arguments most frequently used in creative strategies. The product is usually a toy or is the means by which real toys can be achieved. For Alonso (1995:111), the presence of the game as an integral part of the emotional advertising strategy goes way beyond the twenty seconds the advert lasts, as it becomes present in the child's everyday life and is mixed in with his or her social routines.

Children play with the promotional games that accompany the products: they take them to school, they incorporate them into the family environment, they form part of their conversations, etc. In this respect, the authors also note the importance of the jingle repeated throughout the advert, as a hook that is closely linked to the emotional strategies used by adverts for preadolescents and, as we have explained, to children's fun-related routines:

> *"With the advert-game, child action is provoked as a prolongation of the advertising message in space and time. The vehicle used for this effect is, in the great majority of cases, a very short and catchy song that includes a mention of a product brand. The song acts by animating and strengthening the message per se, its direct effectiveness, giving it appeal but also serving as a vehicle for an effect that extends its reach. The technique is not from today, of course. [...] but this technique, in addition to surviving, has become generalised and is currently included in more than 80 per cent of adverts aimed at children. Catchy songs appear continuously and are learned and chanted by children, who take them out onto the street and repeat them in homes. Children, protagonists and spokespeople, confuse the fun aspect with the indirect advertising activity, carried out as a spontaneous and free spokesperson. Sympathy towards the product comes from sympathy towards the corresponding song. Advantage is taken of the knowledge of the message by playing and comparing those who know the greatest number of them, those who remember them best or who associate songs and products most quickly. As it becomes more "modern", the most important variation of this technique is in condensing the message, becoming simpler and little more than a repeti-*

tion of brands and synthetic slogans, far from developing an anecdote or from listing actions or behaviours."

In fact, these elements that are complementary to the product per se, such as gifts or prizes, are no more than a notable part of all the emotional strategy supporting the advertising campaign. Often, when the emotional product/target links are not perfectly defined, they need something to accentuate the advertising.

Jean-Noël Kapferer (1985:105-106) notes, in this respect, that the gifts offered within the product packaging itself are those preferred by children over other formulas such as competitions or exchanging points for gifts. The author also points out that most young children ask their parents for the product via the accompanying gift and not via the product itself.

3.3. The dual fragmentation of reality: a search for meaning in advertising discourse

Given the encapsulating properties of TV advertising discourse per se, it's true that any spot tends to systematically fragment reality. Advertising shows us specific scenes from an inexistent life in which the product is key to achieving the most hidden dreams.

Moments of intimacy, family scenes, memories, deliriums, fascinations... In short, moments or snippets of life captured in twenty seconds and repeated until we are sated in the midst of TV narration. Advertising never shows the whole story, there is never a proposal, a crisis and a denouement in accordance with the structures of traditional narrative. In a manner similar to epic novels, the stories told in adverts start under the cover of the concept of *in media res*; in other words, without a clear need for a logical beginning or ending. Most adverts actually become a metaphor for the *voyeur* who realises there is a hole in the wall when the scene being observed on the other side has already started and, on being discovered by the lovers, is suddenly deprived of his or her observation and must resort to imagination to complete the end of the story.

In this way, although fragmentation governs any advertising narrative, it's important to repeat here the fact that, in the case of advertising for young children, this restriction of the field of view occurs much more profusely. In other words, although the product being advertised is the key to a

triumph that can be shown to the audience, or left to the mercy of the imagination of the viewer, in advertising designed to persuade an adult public, in fact very rarely do children's adverts leave this outcome in suspense, as any possible story is delimited by what the images show.

So, the benefit or basic promise of the product advertised in spots aimed at children is always to be found in the present, in the fragment of reality shown during the advertising time. We can therefore say that the future does not exist, in advertising terms, for this audience. The products advertised are a means of improving the present situation, as any other supposition is systematically removed from the narration.

Dinosaurs that appear in the middle of the desert to calm the thirst of young children; girls that transform into footballers after eating a portion of cheese... There is no future in this fragment of reality constructed as a tool to persuade boys and girls, because showing or simply give cause to imagining the moment after the action shown would mean ending the fantastic and eminently phantasmagorical component used as a basic strategy in advertising aimed at this segment.

As stated by Joan Ferrés (1996:78-80), seduction via fragmentation is based on emotive hyper-stimulation and, according to the author, as emotion has a globalising effect, it tends to project the value of the part over the whole. That's why the adverts analysed show how buying a certain product will change the whole fragment of life that appears on the screen, but does not allow room to look for meaning beyond what is shown. Ferrés points out, in this respect, that "the process of seduction therefore has an initial fragmenting phase, decomposing reality, with the aim of eliminating the dimensions that are of interest to camouflage, and a second globalising phase, of reconstruction, consisting of transferring the values of the fascinating dimension selected to the whole".

We can therefore see that, similarly, advertising aimed at children selects a certain fragment of the possible world to avoid dispersion or interpretation of this pseudoreality beyond what is shown in the images. This formula clearly coincides with the distinction made by Carlos Lomas (1996: 67-69) between advertising that announces and that which enounces. For the author, the communicative ideologies of advertising follow two different orientations or ways of pro-

ducing discourse of persuasion: advertising that announces by means of referring to objects and representing the world alluded to in the discourse, and advertising that enounces, in which meaning is dispersed in the text in a thousand and one random signifieds with the aim of predicting other things, of constructing a spectacle around the brand or the object in order to place them in the centre of attention.

Advertising that announces is that used by creatives who aim their pieces mostly at the infant and pre-adolescent target. Although it is also used in the case of certain products aimed at adults, it's true that, in spots designed for the target we are discussing here, this is where advertising that announces finds its pride of place.

Based on the theories of David Ogilvy (1963), these spots aspire to inform about the product, in the words of Lomas himself, to propose a fragment of life hardly more veritable than truth; i.e. to reflect obvious things literally. On the other hand, there is advertising that enounces; those spots that aim to construct a reality beyond the referent.

In this respect, Jacques Séguéla (1985) points out that this kind of advertising aims to erase the boredom of everyday shopping, dressing up in dreams products that, without these advertisements, would be no more than they really are. We can therefore state that, while advertising aimed at young children fragments the world in a more generalist way, showing snippets of reality that are no more than everyday scenes where the product appears as the key element in the present action, most of the spots aimed at a target of adult age divide reality into ultimate consequences, showing its minimum expression, so that viewers produce their own reality based on the affective transfers resulting from a product presented as a key to future happiness. Fragmentation in advertising pieces for children is realistic; the fragmentation in adverts for adults is completely symbolic.

This differentiation is connected with the concepts of obvious and obtuse advertising proposed by Roland Barthes (1986). Obvious advertising is referential, denotative, that which alludes to people, objects and services that describe products' qualities. The type of advertising discourse mentioned is that which is usually applied to persuade a younger target because, as revealed by Carlos Lomas (1996:68):

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"The scenes, actions, things, gestures, characters or settings refer to other scenes, actions, things, gestures, characters or settings of everyday life, producing in the addressee a certain reality effect *and, consequently, the certainty of it having been experienced and true. In terms of referential ideology, it is therefore a case of* making seem true *by means of narrative, figurative (and not abstract) and descriptive (never normative) discourses the things that are said (and predicted) of the objects in the adverts. In referential advertising, everything is aimed at deploying a communicative strategy that allows the discourse on the object to be presented as something true or at least likely. In what is enounced by referential advertising, the textual and narrative procedures help to create in the reader a certain sensation of reality (a certain reflection of life): the use of descriptive enunciates, the logical progress of the shots (without suspension or flashbacks) and the correspondence between the time of the narration and the time of what is narrated would be some of the discursive stratagems used in referential advertising [...]."*

This constant interest in showing a young audience a fragment of pseudo-reality with the aim of making it credible is perfectly palpable in any of the spots aimed at this target. In this fragmentation there is no kind of desire to complicate the stories narrated, to oblige the viewer to look beyond the signified of the audiovisual discourse that is unfolding before their eyes.

In clear contrast is oblique advertising which, in the words of Jean Marie Floch (1991 [1993:214-216]), became the negation of referential advertising, as it destroys its positivist ideology. Here, the meaning that must be constructed is not anything that existed before. The consumer being targeted is the subject of a cognitive fact, because his or her intelligence is constantly tested, as he or she must look for signifieds and signifiers that go way beyond that of the advertising enunciate.

Lomas (1996) points out that, while referential or denotative advertising require little decoding time and minimal cultural knowledge in order to be understood, those strategies based on connotation aim to reach a target that is presupposed to have a certain knowledge of the world and minimal experience.

This point is therefore related to something we have noted in this section: while advertising aimed at children shows fragments of pseudo-reality and does not aspire to note details that may be out of shot, advertising campaigns aimed at an adult public use, most of the time and always depending on the product being advertised and the target chosen, obtuse or connotative advertising; i.e. that which transgresses the fragment shown in the twenty seconds of the advert.

So, obtuse advertising aimed at young children, therefore, would not be very likely to succeed, as their cognitive abilities are limited to those elements they are capable of recognising and, by extension, of relating with the most immediate context.

3.4 The exacerbated use of special effects
Clearly related to concepts such as fantasy, magic or the narrative nature of video games, to which we have referred in previous sections, we can observe that, unlike advertisements aimed at an adult target, advertising created for children does not disguise its special effects. In other words, while adult creative strategies are determined to show as natural facts that, in fact, contradict the laws of all logic, adverts designed for children have no problem in showing, and even exaggerate, certain aspects that, because they are incredible, help to feed the children's desire for the object being advertised.

Cartoon rabbits that come alive and explain to the protagonist of the advert and, at the same time, to the viewer, the benefits of a chocolate powder; children capable of flying, doing unimaginable flips after eating a portion of cheese, talkative dinosaurs that fall from the sky to inform viewers of the change in the name of a certain yoghurt... The benefit or basic promise of the product being advertised has double the potential impact thanks to a clever combination of stories that are appealing to young children and special effects that belong more to the latest intergalactic sagas that an everyday scene in the dining room of any home.

So special effects are often included in the plots of advertisements aimed at children. The frequency of this is such that, far from becoming ridiculous, the fact that special effects form part of the spot has become an added value with regard to the curiosity that the product in question can awaken in the viewer.

Cartoons, obviously related to the "magic helper" mentioned above, and computer enhanced images in order to achieve movements or shapes that do not exist in real film, are the most usual special effects in advertising aimed at children. Cartoons in the form of a mascot or pet are some of the most frequently used emotional arguments by publicists who, in their creative strategy, do not hesitate to transform these apparently innocent characters into firm endorsers of the product being advertised, as explained by Alonso M. *et al.*, (1995: 103):

> *"[...] The mascots jump from the products' wrappers to the scenes in the adverts, maintaining their animated figure in contact and interrelation with the characters (usually in real images) in the scenes [...] in this way evident elements of dynamism, complicity and diversion are thereby incorporated into the product presentation, in addition to reinforcing the brand image through the mascot representing it."*

As stated by the same authors (Alonso M. *et al.*, 1995: 105), most publicists defend the use of emotive arguments in which product consumption is related to almost magical situations, believing that the mechanisms of the suggestive conventions unleashed "are known or easily noticed by the public". In other words, according to the opinion of a large part of advertising creatives, no child really believes that, by using or consuming a certain product, they might find themselves in situations equivalent to those experienced by the protagonists of the stories used to present the virtues of what is being advertised.

This hypothesis is reinforced by the study carried out by Anderson and Field[7] in 1983, mentioned by Lorenzo Vilches when alluding to the production and reception of TV formats by children (Vilches, 1993:79), stating that special effects don't actually have much effect on children's attention. This statement, added to the previous one, irremediably attacks reality, something which forces us to ask a question: if, really, children do not believe in the fantastic attributions of the product and if, at the same time, the special effects used in the plots are not very useful for catching their attention, why

is magical realism, emphasised by special effects, used so much as a sales argument?

Leaving to one side the opinions expressed beforehand, we can state that the special effects applied habitually to advertising aimed at children form part of the theory proposed by Jesús González Requena and Amaya Ortiz de Zárate (1995: 16-17), according to which an empirical object is never desirable but rather its image, in this case nothing more effective than digital technologies applied to advertising creativity, both to achieve a sufficiently appealing perception of the product and also to captivate children halfway between childhood and adolescence:

> *"If the purpose of the empirical object is to deceive, it is because desire does not have, after all, anything to do with it: desire is always illusory (and therefore an illusion) because what we really desire are not empirical objects but a certain thing that has no equivalent in reality: i.e. pure images and, more than anything else, imaginary images.*
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> *In other words: the object of desire does not have a reality, it is purely imaginary, purely illusory... So, there is truly a specific of the images: that which only exists in them, that which, in spite of all illusions, does not exist anywhere: what is imagined, i.e. the mirage of desire.*
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> *So, if there is an exemplary image, an image that best shows what is specific of the images, that is the image perceived by the madman in his delirium, but also that which the lover forges of his desire for love and, finally, all those that mobilise our desire for objects that always, ultimately, must disappoint us. And all these imaginary images are delirious images. And that's why the whole area of seduction, including advertising seduction, must start with them."*

The concept of *delirious image* applied by the authors to the analysis of advertising discourse is, therefore, the reflection of the object, the result of hiding reality by applying special effects that provide the product with magical properties, that make the dreams of the advert's protagonists come true and transform the everyday into a veritable hallucinogenic paradise.

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7   ANDERSON D. R; FIELD D. E. "Children's attention to television: implications for production". In: MEYER, M. (ed) *Children and the Formal Features of Television.* Munic: Saur, 1981.

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As pointed out by González and Ortiz (1995:18), in advertising discourse, reality passes onto a secondary plane, as the rhetoric used and the application of techniques such as special effects merely strengthen the imaginary plane, i.e. the unreal world resulting from the everyday that, faced with the avalanche of fantasy, ends up become absolutely irrelevant for the viewer.

> *"We are witnessing a seductive device aimed, obviously, at seducing and therefore located on the margin of all cognitive mechanisms such as belief, for example. It fundamentally works at the margin of sign, as it essentially occurs on the plane of what is imagined. Its basic tools are images in their delirious component, and its work consists of staging the desired object. It's important not to forget that this object is purely imaginary: it's staging must therefore be hallucinogenic, delirious. Therefore an amorous object."*

So advertising designed for young children does not actually attempt to achieve the real Narcissus but his reflection on the surfaces of the lake, the image embellished by the reflection of the sun and the blue of the sky, the object in the mirror after a make-up session... and it's true that, in this respect, adverts for an adult audience are no different. The difference lies in that, contrary to advertising for an adult target, spots for children, far from hiding the supernatural nature of certain situations, strengthen them to the extent of making these advertising formats veritable discourses, in a brief format and with an evident commercial aim, of the fantastic genre that inundated television in the seventies.

4. Final considerations

The absence of audiovisual resources specifically for young children is something which, instead of being limited to advertising, is evident in the programming of most television channels in Spain.

As we have stated throughout this article, advertising creativity at the service of an exclusively young target has negatively affected other formulas that, capable of reaching several targets, are much more profitable for advertisers and agencies. The need for multiple and plural consumers relegates creative strategies to a language that has ended up not distinguishing between ages nor conditions, a code that young children have had to learn and that has actually become a secret key that has opened up, to millions of children the world over, the doors of a precocious consumption that had previously been limited to the adult world.

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