

Fortaleza Parents' Perception of Advertising Targeted at the Child Audience

Prof. Dr. Rickardo Léo Ramos Gomes¹; Spec. Meiriele Lima dos Santos²; Profa. M. Sc. Mônica Maria Bezerra Farias³

¹ Department of the Euvaldo Lodi Institute (IEL), and Postgraduate Department of the Farias Brito University Center (FBUNI), Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

² Financial and Tax Management Specialist from Farias Brito University Center (FBUNI), Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

³ Master Professor at Estácio de Sá University Center, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

Corresponding Author: Prof. Dr. Rickardo Léo Ramos Gomes. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6101-9571>.

Abstract: This article addressed the topic of child advertising with the overall objective of elucidating the opinions of parents from Fortaleza regarding advertising directed at the child audience. To achieve this study's goals, bibliographic, descriptive, and field research were conducted, adopting an exploratory approach with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The main purpose of this work is to explicate the viewpoints of Fortaleza parents concerning the regulation of advertising targeting children. Two hypotheses were formulated: the majority of respondents lack knowledge/opinions on the subject of child advertising, and advertising does not emerge as the primary influencer of children's behavior, according to the participants' perspectives. Overall, it was confirmed that most surveyed parents are unaware of child advertising issues; however, they consider advertising to be a significant influencing mechanism on children's behavior.

Keywords: Child advertising; Influencing mechanism; Child behavior; Parents.

Date of Submission: 14-07-2023

Date of Acceptance: 29-07-2023

I. INTRODUCTION

This work aims to contribute to the development of a more critical perspective on what is being conveyed in the media targeting Brazilian children and the extent of its influence in shaping this audience. Furthermore, this study can serve as a counterpoint to discussions about the approach used in child advertising, where it may become aware of the need for more sensitive and informed content, considering the delicate nature of its target audience, children.

It is worth noting that this study may assist other researchers seeking to delve into the subject matter, as it deals with a very current topic that could have various implications in other fields such as Advertising, Psychology, among others.

To achieve this study's goals, bibliographic, descriptive, and field research was conducted, adopting an exploratory approach with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The sample for this research was probabilistic, and data was collected through a questionnaire applied to parents from Fortaleza who have children aged between 2 and 8 years old, randomly approached at establishments located in the Aldeota neighborhood.

The overall objective of this work is to elucidate the viewpoints of Fortaleza parents regarding the regulation of advertising targeting the child audience. Based on this general objective, the following specific objectives were formulated: to assess the level of knowledge among Fortaleza parents about the regulation of child advertising; to highlight the influence of children on family consumption, according to the surveyed audience; to identify changes in children's behavior regarding product consumption as reported by Fortaleza parents; to enumerate, based on the respondents' opinions, the main means and communication mechanisms that influence child behavior.

As a result, two hypotheses were formulated: the majority of surveyed individuals lack knowledge/opinions about the prohibition of child advertising; advertising does not emerge as the primary influencer of children's behavior, according to the participants' perspectives.

This work is structured as follows: this introduction is followed by a theoretical framework that addresses the topics of children's consumer behavior and the regulation of child advertising. In the subsequent section, the research methodology used for this study is described. Following this, the field research results, concluding remarks, and bibliographic references are presented.

II. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

The scientific methodology, according to Prodanov (2006, p.17), "prescribes a set of rules through which knowledge must be developed." In this sense, the present study was conducted based on exploratory research and complementary research, including bibliographic, descriptive, and field approaches, addressing both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Exploratory research, as defined by Gil (1999, p.43), aims to provide a general view of a specific fact, of an approximate nature. In this context, the current research sought to raise the primary questions concerning the studied topic. Adding to this notion, Gil (1999, p.43) defines:

A work is exploratory in nature when it involves bibliographic survey, interviews with people who have had (or have) practical experiences with the researched problem, and analysis of examples that stimulate comprehension. It has the basic purpose of developing, clarifying, and modifying concepts and ideas for the formulation of subsequent approaches. Therefore, this type of study aims to provide the researcher with a greater understanding of the subject matter, allowing for the formulation of more precise issues or hypotheses to be investigated in subsequent studies.

According to Vergara (2000), bibliographic research is a systematic study based on material published in books, journals, newspapers, and electronic networks. It provides analytical tools for any other type of research. In this sense, valuable information was added through the use of academic articles addressing the regulation of child advertising.

Regarding the need to investigate the profile and perception of the research participants on the topic, a descriptive research approach was chosen, aiming, according to Gil (1999, p.44), "to describe the characteristics of a specific population or phenomenon or establish relationships between variables. It involves the use of standardized data collection techniques: questionnaires and systematic observation. In general, it takes the form of surveys."

Malhotra (2011, p.147) highlights the degree of contribution that field surveys provide: "Field survey data does much more than merely report behavior. Field surveys can provide insight into who consumers are, how they behave, and why they behave in certain ways."

Regarding the problem's approach, the research can be qualitative, which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.1), "involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its research objective, "or quantitative, which, on the other hand, "seeks to quantify data and typically involves some form of statistical analysis."

Contandriopoulos et al. (1999) state that quantitative analyzes are widely disseminated and, in this sense, their planning generally requires less explanation than qualitative analyses.

Thus, concerning the research universe or population, Gressler (2004) defines it as the aggregate of all elements that possess specific characteristics as defined within the research itself. In turn, Malhotra (2011) clarifies that to obtain information about population parameters, a census or a sample is performed, where a census involves a complete count of every element in a population, and a sample is a subgroup of the population.

In this context, the research universe is composed of parents of children aged 2 to 8 years, natives of Fortaleza. Within this universe, a non-probabilistic convenience sample was established, reaching 120 respondents. According to Samara and Barros (2007, p.161), "elements of non-probabilistic convenience samples are selected based on the researcher's convenience." Thus, parents were approached at a school near the researcher's residence, as well as at places from her niece's routine, such as the dance school she attends, a beauty salon with a children's space, and, mainly, at children's birthday parties. The sample calculation followed statistical criteria with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

The data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire containing 12 closed-ended questions, 7 chained questions, 3 dichotomous questions, 2 ordinal scale preference questions, 1 open-ended question, and 1 semi-open question. As Samara and Barros (2007, p.120) define, "a questionnaire is structured when it has a logical sequence of questions that cannot be modified or include the interviewer's insertions."

This data collection instrument was adapted from the questionnaire used in the graduation thesis of Gabrielle Moller, who graduated in Business Administration from Centro Universitário Feevale. To validate the research instrument, a pre-test was previously conducted on 10% of the planned sample. "The pre-test refers to testing the questionnaire on a small sample of respondents to identify and eliminate potential problems." (Malhotra, 2011)

The research was conducted between May 6 and June 2, 2013, at the following establishments: Casa da Tia Lea daycare-school, Donnas e Bambinos salon, Play Station Del Paseo birthday party venue, and Xenia Skeff dance school. The survey was revised in 2023 for publication purposes and the statistical analysis of the data was performed using an Excel spreadsheet and the Google Drive application.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Results

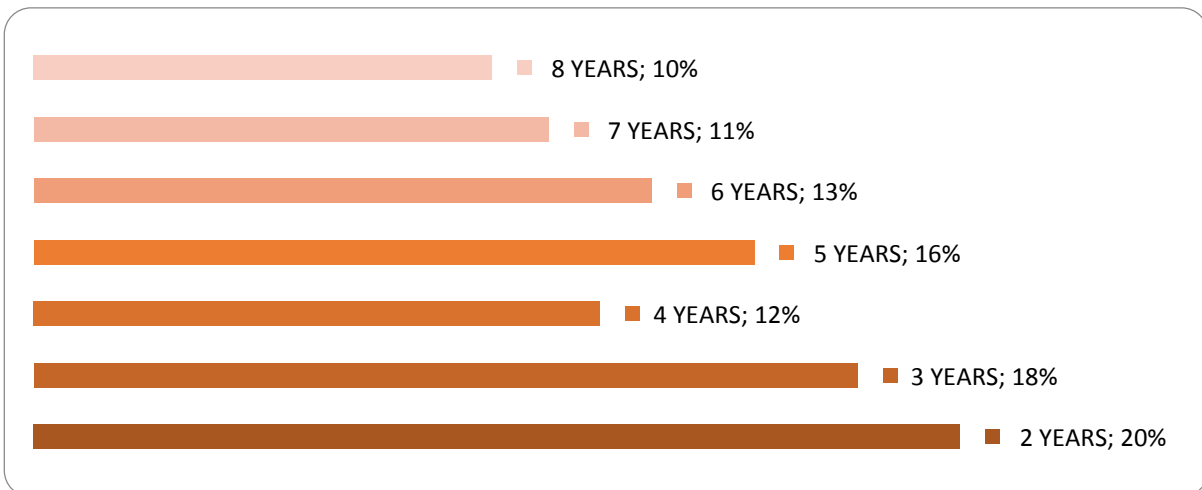
3.1.1 Data Analysis

Based on the collected data, it was observed that the majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 88% of the sample, while the remaining 12% were male. According to the survey, the age range of the sample consisted of 1% of parents aged between 18 and 25 years, 21% of parents aged between 26 and 32 years, 60% aged between 33 and 39 years, 17% aged between 40 and 47 years, and 1% did not respond.

Regarding marital status, it was identified that the majority of the respondents were married, representing 85% of the sample, 6% were divorced, 7% were single, 1% were widowed, and 1% did not respond. Regarding the educational level of the respondents, 4% had completed elementary education, 15% had completed high school, 36% had completed higher education, and 45% had postgraduate degrees. Regarding the question about the number of children, the following result was obtained: 44% of the respondents had only one child, 39% had two children, and 17% had three children.

Considering the age range between 2 and 8 years, as defined by the researcher, the children of the respondents showed the following composition: 20% were 2 years old, 18% were 3 years old, 12% were 4 years old, 16% were 5 years old, 13% were 6 years old, 11% were 7 years old, and finally, 10% were 8 years old. As for the gender of the children, 48% were female, 36% were male, and the parents of 16% of the children did not respond, as shown in the graph below.

Graph 1 - Age range of the children



Source: Research data

When asked if they work outside their homes, 90% of the interviewed parents responded that both spouses work outside, 9% responded that only one spouse works outside, and 1% did not respond. Next, the parents were asked about who takes care of their children while they are working. 38% of the children are under the care of babysitters or housekeepers, 33% of the parents leave their children at school for a period, 16% of the children stay in school full-time, 10% of the parents leave their children under the care of grandparents, and 3% of the children are cared for by others.

They were also asked if they consider their children to watch too much television. 51% responded yes, while 49% of the parents said their children do not watch too much television. There is a technical tie, with half of the parents considering their children to watch too much TV and the other half disagreeing.

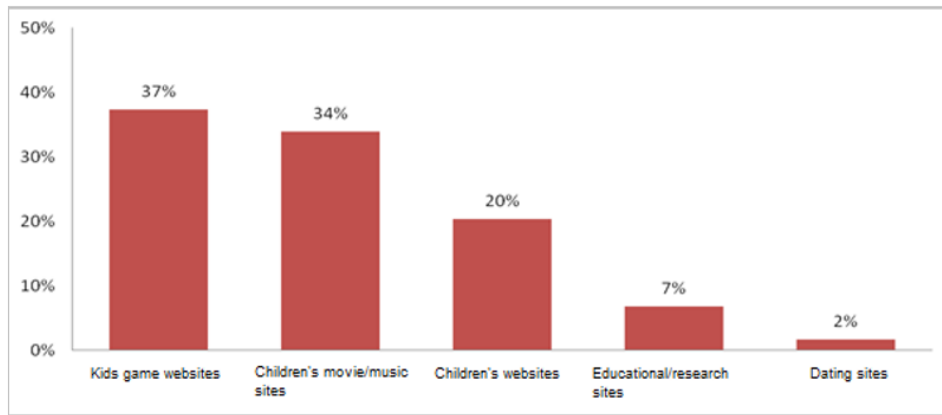
Subsequently, the parents were asked about the number of weekly hours their children spend watching TV. 17% watch up to 2 hours, 34% reported that their children spend between 3 and 5 hours, 33% of the children spend between 6 and 8 hours, 15% say their children spend more than 8 hours per week watching TV, and 1% said their children do not watch TV.

Regarding the programs of greatest interest to the children, the parents responded that 44% prefer cartoons, 34% of the children watch children's programs, 17% prefer movies, 3% said their children watch sports, while soap operas and other (children's series) each have 1% of the preference.

Next, the parents responded about the availability of the internet in their homes. 94% have internet at home, and only 6% do not have internet. Thus, those who confirmed having internet at home were asked about the number of weekly hours their children access the internet. 38% of the children access up to 2 hours, 18%

between 3 and 5 hours, 8% between 6 and 8 hours, 7% access the internet for more than 8 hours, and 29% of the parents informed that their children do not access the internet. The next question asked which sites are of greatest interest to the children. 37% of the parents responded that the sites of children's games are of most interest, followed by movie and music sites with 34%, and children's sites such as Gloop, Discovery Kids, research sites, and relationship sites accounted for 29%.

Graph 2 - Sites of greatest interest to children.

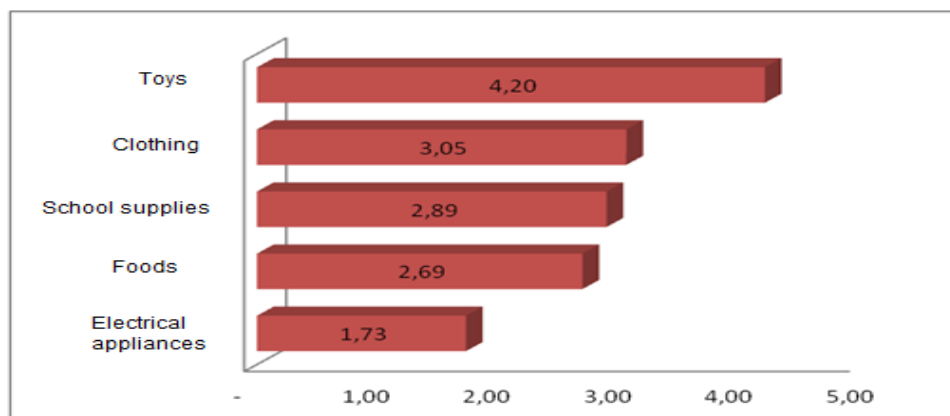


Source: Research data

According to the respondents' opinions, advertising aimed at children influences their behavior, as represented by 97% of the respondents who responded affirmatively, against 3% who consider that there is no influence from advertising. The presented result confirms the opinion of Linn (2006, p. 57), "advertising clearly influences the things that children ask for - if it weren't so, companies wouldn't spend so much money on it." In this regard, the question about the need for greater regulation of advertising aimed at the children obtained similar results, as 90% of the respondents believe that there should be greater regulation, while 8% responded that there is no need, and 2% did not respond. Parents who responded that there would be no change in behavior justified their response, mainly by considering that the family, the education received at home, in short, the upbringing is what shapes the behavior of children and not exposure to advertisements.

Three questions sought to identify the influence of children on family purchases as well as the role they play. Thus, 42% of parents reported that their children have a regular influence, 33% have little influence, 14% of parents indicated no influence of their children in shopping decisions, 8% said there is a lot of influence, and 3% did not respond. While the influence on family shopping decisions ranged from little to regular, the children's participation in purchases of products aimed at them presented the following result: 53% frequently participate in purchases, 32% rarely, 8% always participate when products are aimed at them, 4% do not participate, and 3% did not respond. In the opinion of the respondents, the toys segment receives the most influence from children when making a purchase, averaging 4.20 on the influence scale. In second place, with an average of 3.05, is clothing; right after, with an average of 2.89, is school supplies; in fourth place, food, with an average of 2.69, and finally, in fifth place, the electronics segment was indicated with an average of 1.73. As observed in the graph below.

Graph 3 - Segments in order of influence.



Source: Research data

Regarding the role played by children in family purchases, the role of product user predominated, according to 64% of parents. The role of influencer appeared with 14%, followed by initiator with 13%. 4% of parents stated that their children take on the role of purchase decision-makers, only 3% reported that their children take on the role of buyer, and 2% of respondents did not respond.

The presented result allows us to establish a direct relationship between the children's age range under analysis and their role in the family shopping process. With 79% of children between 2 and 6 years old, it is worth noting what was advocated by Le Bigot (1980). According to the author, children between 0 and 6 years old are in the phase of individual products that concern them directly.

In the parents' view, the media appears as the main motivator for children to want to buy a product, with an average of 3.11 on the influence scale. In second place, with an average of 2.82, are friends. Family appears in third place with an average of 2.28, and finally, the internet occupies fourth place with an average of 1.61.

The penultimate question asked parents about their children's favorite programs. 47% stated that their children prefer to play in the park and playgrounds, 15% prefer to go shopping and make purchases, 10% prefer to go to the beach and travel on weekends, 9% like to play at the homes of cousins, friends, or grandparents, 6% said their children like to go to the theater and bookstores, 5% prefer to play at home, play video games, or watch TV, 3% prefer places with toys, and another 3% prefer physical activities like cycling, skateboarding, and playing ball. 2% did not respond.

The last question aimed to identify the parents' attitude when their children insist on buying unnecessary products. 38% propose the purchase of another product that they consider more necessary; 36% simply do not buy; 10% complain but buy the product anyway; 2% did not respond. It is worth highlighting the 14% who responded that they adopt other approaches, such as initiating financial education through piggy banks, where children acquire what they desire independently of their parents' opinion using saved money; establishing that they can only receive the desired object on special occasions; explaining the reasons for not buying and discussing the need versus desire relationship; considering the harmful effects of "junk food" in the case of food items, and making the child aware of the reasons for not buying.

3.2. Discussions

3.2.1 Child Consumer Behavior

Gone are the days when children were content with receiving gifts only on special occasions like Children's Day, Christmas, and birthdays. Their perceptions of consuming toys and clothing have adapted to the frantic movement of consumerism. In other words, every day is a day to acquire the new Barbie sandals and the snack that comes with a little toy representing characters from the latest successful children's movie. According to Petti and Maia (2009, p. 26), "the children's market is serious business. Today's children not only know - and request - what they want to buy but also help determine the family's consumption."

Thus, the consumer behavior of children has been studied in the context of consumer socialization, which was defined in the 1970s by one of the early researchers on the topic, Ward (1974). He described it as a process where the child "acquires the capacity, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become a consumer: being able to feel desires and preferences, seek to satisfy them, make a choice and a purchase, and evaluate the product and its alternatives".

As a result, the inclusion of children in the realm of consumption is observed at an increasingly early age, where they interact with unique characteristics based on their age groups. Consequently, certain authors identify specific behaviors in distinct phases.

Mowen (2003) suggests that between the ages of 3 and 6, children have no knowledge of any perspective other than their own, thus being in a developmental stage of consumer socialization oriented towards what is immediate and readily observable. The phase from 7 to 11 years old is considered the analytical phase, where symbolic thinking develops, allowing for a more sophisticated understanding of the market. However, it is only from the age of 8 that children comprehend that others may hold different opinions than theirs.

In light of this, McNeal (2000) proposes that the development of consumer behavior in childhood be divided into 5 stages: observation, request, selection, assisted purchase, and independent purchase. The first stage, called observation, occurs when the child is around two months old; it is usually at this age that the child makes their first visit to a commercial establishment. The stage of request is characterized when the child is around two years old. It is the time when the child asks for the observed product, making the request through gestures and words. Around three and a half years old, the child can already remove products from the shelves on their own, constituting the selection stage. Only at the age of five and a half does the child make their first purchase, but still with the assistance of parents. Hence, this stage is named assisted purchase. However, upon reaching eight years old, the child becomes a true purchaser, as they perform the act of purchase independently of their parents' presence, thus characterizing the stage of independent purchase.

In addition, Le Bigot (1980) states that children's consumption changes according to their age. He emphasizes that as their cognitive abilities and financial resources develop as they grow, there is a synergy effect leading to an expansion of the sphere of consumption, as described below:

Table 1 – Phases of Child Behavior

PHASE	AGE RANGE	BEHAVIOR
Individual products that directly concern them	0 to 2 years	More rejection than solicitation regarding toys and food shown to them
	2 to 4 years	First requests regarding clothes, books, and records
	4 to 6 years	Preferences become more pronounced.
Expansion of interests towards family products	7 to 8 years	Requests become more precise and increasingly oriented towards familiar products used by the family
	9 to 11 years	Family purchases, such as automobiles, vacations, or equipment, and the emergence of desires for adult-oriented products
Becomes an expert in products of their interest	12 to 14 years	Focuses on a reduced number of centers of interest and becomes unbeatable in certain areas (bicycles, computers, etc.)

Source: Le Bigot (1980)

Thus, a consumer-oriented behavior is observed in the early years of life. According to Heckseher (1960) cited by Karsaklian (2009, p. 240), “the leisure society, which is ours, is inseparably linked to the consumer society and has significantly influenced children, making them aware of their role as consumers”.

Concomitant with the influence of the consumer society is the process of child socialization, which Limeira (2008, p. 163) describes as follows:

Socialization is the process by which children acquire beliefs, values, norms, knowledge, and skills, enabling them to participate as active members of culture and society. The socialization of children is a function attributed to the family, school, and other social institutions, such as the media and professional groups.

Considering one of the most recent theories proposed in 1998 about child socialization, which is revolutionizing the world of developmental psychology. In her book "The Nurture Assumption," Judith Rich Harris cited by Karsaklian (2009, p. 241) states that "children's socialization does not occur through parents, but through friends." According to the author, children do not need to be accepted or appreciated by reference groups (ethnic groups, family, schoolmates, among others), but they adopt their values and behave, evidently, according to them. This theory is called socialization through groups.

Harris (1998) cited by Callegaro (2011, p. 170-171) concludes:

That children were not designed to learn exclusively from their parents. They are important in the early development of the child, and certain forms of learning in early childhood can leave deep marks. However, the parents' influence on their children becomes less important in the course of a long journey of social learning, which occurs through interaction with other children, especially by observing and imitating older ones.

Defining the concept of reference group, we have: "It is the group with which an individual identifies and serves as a point of comparison - or reference - for the general or specific formation of values, attitudes, or behaviors, dictating a certain pattern". (Samara, & Barros, 2007)

According to Solomon (2002), reference groups influence consumers in three ways: informational influence, utilitarian influence, and value-expressive influence. The author explains that informational influence is when individuals seek information about the product from groups of specialized professionals or associations that work with the product as a profession. On the other hand, utilitarian influence occurs in the purchasing decision, when individuals base their desire to satisfy co-workers or people with whom they interact. And finally, value-expressive influence is seen when individuals believe that the purchase or use of a certain brand will promote the image that others have of them and add to the image they want to have or aspire to (sense of identity and idealization).

In this context, the media is identified as a reference group, as children from a tender age are exposed to TV programs and advertisements for products directed at them, even before they become part of social groups such as school.

Reinforcing this idea, Linn (2006, p. 25) describes:

Today, children are bombarded with ads everywhere - at home, at school, on sports fields, playgrounds, and streets. They spend almost forty hours a week engaged with the media - radio, television, movies, and the internet - with most of it driven by commercials.

According to the IBOPE National Television Panel (2007), Brazilian children spend an average of 4 hours, 51 minutes, and 19 seconds in front of the TV. Considering that parents spend 8 to 10 hours at work, their children's interaction with TV is greater.

In this reality, the relationship between parents and children takes on "commercial" contours, as trust and respect inherent in family life are influenced by negotiation tactics. Thus, one can exemplify with a child who requests a new toy for every positive result at school.

In this regard, Montigneaux (2003, p. 17) states: "The relationships between parents and children, once marked by authority, are gradually changing. Today, there is a tendency for this relationship with the child to be marked by negotiation," this occurs because parents feel guilty about their inevitable absences, preferring to negotiate with the little ones as a way to fill these voids.

This reality does not go unnoticed by advertising agents, who spend over 209 million reais in Brazil on advertising aimed at children in sectors that generated over 15 billion reais in the economy (clothing, 5.58 billion reais; fast food, 5 billion reais; toys, 1 billion reais, among others), according to 2009 data from the Union Public Ministry (MPU). Kotler (2003, p. 193) suggests: "I would like companies to spend more time and money on designing exceptional products, instead of trying to manipulate consumers' perceptions through expensive advertising campaigns. The best advertising is done by satisfied customers."

Questions arise about the ethics of advertising aimed at children and the influence it represents on the behavior of child consumers. Solomon (2002, p. 296) states that "the media teaches people about values and myths of a culture. The more a child is exposed to television, the more they will accept the images as real."

Thus, such exposure and its direct relationship with children's consumption practices can lead to the emergence of numerous problems. Some of these, as identified by the Child and Consumer Project (2006) of the Alana Institute, include early sexualization, behavioral disorders, violence, eating disorders, and family stress.

In this sense, the influence of advertising on food habits was demonstrated by Goldberg, Gorn, and Gibson (1978) cited by Karsaklian (2009, p. 254) "when it was found that the products most chosen by children for breakfast were those presented in the commercials."

Karsaklian (2009) complements the idea that children, although aware of relevant product information, lack the discernment for conscious use. Based on this assumption, Karsaklian (2009, p. 254) highlights the immaturity of child consumers, noting that:

In this case, we can see again that there is a gap between what children know and how they use such knowledge.

Realizing that a certain product has no nutritional value does not prevent them from desiring it. In reality, 'not being good for health' represents something very abstract to them.

However, it is up to the family, society, and the state to join forces to ensure the integrity of children regarding advertising exposure and its effects on consumer behavior, through the regulation of advertising directed at children.

3.2.2 Regulation of Child Advertising

There is a growing concern in society about the influence of advertising campaigns on the development of children's behavior. In this context, it is worth knowing the regulation of child advertising in force in Brazil, as well as examples of regulation in countries such as Belgium, Canada, among others. According to a study by the Legislative Consultancy of the Chamber of Deputies, where the author states:

Brazilian advertising regulation adopts a mixed system, in which general consumer protection rules and more sensitive issues such as alcohol, tobacco, and child advertising are dealt with by legislation, while more common issues are governed by self-regulation. In quantitative terms, most of the advertising is subject only to self-regulation. Thus, the Brazilian Code of Advertising Self-Regulation (CBAP), established in 1978, is, in practice, the main set of rules guiding the ethical principles of Brazilian advertisements. (Lopes, 2010, p. 16)

Although the CBPA is based on specific rules for children and adolescents, such as respecting the dignity, naivety, credulity, inexperience, and loyalty of the target audience; abstaining from encouraging socially condemnable behavior, it faces criticism for largely following the recommendations of the International Chamber of Commerce, the guidelines of the International Advertising Association, and the text of the International Code of Advertising Practice (1937).

In this sense, the National Advertising Self-Regulation Council (CONAR), the body responsible for establishing and applying CBPA rules, is also criticized because, despite being compatible with the Federal Constitution (CF), the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), and the Consumer Defense Code (CDC),

inherent issues in its own conception prevent these devices from being effective. The fact that joining the council is optional does not involve all advertising agencies or communication outlets in the country.

Concurrently, being a private initiative council, CONAR does not have the coercive power of the state. As a result, decisions made by such a Council are not sanctioned. (Silva, 2011, p. 05)

Thus, harmful advertising may be aired and only later receive warnings or recommendations, which does not guarantee that the advertisement will be withdrawn in time to avoid causing further harm.

In this regard, one can cite a case reported in the media this year (2013) about Bauducco, where the company was reported in 2007 by the Alana Institute but only received condemnation in May 2013. In the reported campaign, launched in the same year as the third movie of the Shrek series, it was necessary to buy five products from the "Gulosos" line and add R\$ 5 more to buy wristwatches with characters from the movie. With four different watch models, it would be necessary to consume 20 products to complete the collection. (Dias, 2013)

In addition to paying a fine for the damage caused to society, the company must also stop promoting bundled sales and advertising to children. The rapporteur of the case at the Court of Justice, Judge Ramom Mateo Junior, stated that: "This type of advertising campaign, although commonly used, must be considered abusive and not normal. We need to change the mentality that what is commonplace is normal." (Dias, 2013, p. 25)

It is a fact that Brazil does not have specific legislation to deal with rules on advertising aimed at children, as is the case in Belgium, Canada, among others. In these countries, state intervention in the regulation of child advertising is based on a large number of scientific and marketing studies on the effects of advertising on children and adolescents.

In the Flemish region of Belgium, advertisements are not allowed between five minutes before the start of a program aimed at children and five minutes after its end. However, Canada was a pioneer in the regulation of advertising aimed at children, with the Broadcasting Advertising to Children Code being enacted in 1971. At the same time, each Canadian province may have different, stricter rules. The province of Quebec stands out, where its local consumer protection law prohibits any type of advertising directed at people under 13 years old.

The regulation developed in these countries serves as material for analysis and, consequently, possible adaptations to the Brazilian reality, which has peculiarities and challenges as a developing country. It is worth noting that this study will explain the opinions of those responsible for the main regulation, the limits established by family education in the figure of parents.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to elucidate the opinion of parents from Fortaleza regarding the regulation of advertising directed at children. It was concluded that although parents are unaware of specific initiatives to regulate such advertising, they are in favor of greater regulation. They recognize the fragile and impressionable nature of their children and believe that children's consumerism will be reduced as a consequence of reduced exposure to advertising.

However, parents highlighted that the education received at home and the established boundaries are inseparable factors to minimize the influence of advertising on children's behavior. Therefore, the overall objective was achieved mainly through the perception of mothers, as the majority of respondents were female. Mothers aged over 33 years, with postgraduate education, and having an average of one child, reflecting the current structure of families.

Regarding the specific objective related to the level of knowledge of Fortaleza parents about the regulation of advertising aimed at children, it was verified that most parents are unaware of any regulation. Thus, confirming the first hypothesis drawn, as 71% of the respondents were unaware of any type of regulation.

Regarding the second specific objective, it was highlighted that children have little to moderate influence on family consumption. Thus, the hypothesis that children have a significant influence on family purchases was refuted, although the situation is different when the product is for the child's use. The third objective identified that children present considerable changes in behavior related to consumption. They frequently participate in purchases of products directed at them and exert significant influence in segments such as toys and clothing. Although electronics appear last on the influence scale, they are still present, characteristic of an increasingly connected society.

The following objective that listed the main means and communication mechanisms influencing children's behavior returned media as the main influencer, followed by friends, with family only in third place. This result refuted the second hypothesis, which did not consider advertising as the main influencer of children's behavior. Unintentionally, the refuted hypothesis disregarded the power of influence and persuasion of the media, which is present in children's daily lives. It instills values and trends in these developing individuals without them having the discernment to measure their real intention.

It is noted that the values previously passed on by the family are gradually being replaced by values conveyed in the media and propagated by friends. This situation is believed to be directly related to parents' absence in their children's lives, as 90% of the parents interviewed work outside the home.

However, no one sought to blame or vilify anyone for responsibility. The responsibility lies with everyone, including the family, the government, advertising categories, and commercial sectors. Therefore, the need for debate and restraint of some abusive practices that harm the primary pillar of society, which is the family, and, above all, its future citizens, is evident.

In this sense, the topic cannot remain merely a subject of debate; it requires expediency in the process, as it is a fact that regulation must exist. Perhaps without a prohibitive nature, after all, it concerns regulation in a developing country that bases its growth on population consumption. To remain indifferent to the economic impact that a total prohibition measure could have would be naive.

In this context, it is essential to take a broad look at the topic and ensure that its resolution primarily protects the integrity of children, who are the most vulnerable in this situation. In general, most of the objectives of this article were met, with only one objective and one hypothesis refuted. Therefore, as a recommendation, the researcher suggests expanding the debate and increasing the project's publicity aimed at regulating advertising directed at children. Additionally, further studies are needed to measure and explain the influence and, above all, the impact of advertising on children's behavior.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict to disclose.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank the directors of the Administration Course at Estácio de Sá College for all the attention provided.

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