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ABSTRACT

As more and more food companies appear in the market, competition seems to be getting harder and harder. The scuffle for being the market leader or for gaining an extra point of market-share is an every-day problem and companies continue to investigate what will be the best way to impact their consumers. The challenge lies in deciding what percentage should be invested in in-store, trade-marketing activities, and what percentage must be invested in the increasingly expensive television advertisement expenses. This paper explores the relative influence of these two marketing tools when intending to target children as food consumers. The review suggests that children will react differently according to the stage of consumer socialization they are in, concluding that different strategies should be considered according to the exact age-group a company is intending to target with their product. Finally, recommendations for future research are made in order to complete this study and provide a more holistic and accurate result.

INTRODUCTION

Marketers are faced every day with the dilemma of where to allocate their budget. Although social media is gaining more and more importance in campaign design, there is no doubt that traditional ATL campaigns are still one of the strongest

drivers of brand recall. In contrast, in-store activities are also key in capturing the shopper's attention when faced with an enormous amount of different brands to choose from. Moreover, the study of children as consumers has started various decades ago and is still vastly relevant as many of the largest companies of the world intend to capture this target. We seek to continue this analysis in the light of comparing different marketing techniques. In this sense, this paper is a literary revision that aims at comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of offline advertising as compared to that of packaging and in-store activities in the marketing of food products to children.

Concerns about children's ability to fully comprehend and evaluate advertising messages have stimulated substantial research and heated debates among scholars, business leaders, consumer advocates, and public policy makers for more than three decades (Elizabeth S. Moore, 2004). However, this market continues to be of great attractiveness to companies from all kind of industries: food, games, toys, etc. Not only are children exposed to long hours in front of the TV, but the vulnerability of their cognitive system in their early age is what makes marketing to them so appealing (despite the numerous moral debates that have risen around this matter). It is known that companies invest enormous amounts of their marketing budgets to media placements on TV which tend to be very expensive, regardless of what country we are analyzing. However, research has shown that the children's attention not only drops

considerably at the commercial stage, when compared to the attention put on the show preceding the commercials, but also that as advertisements continue to show up one behind of the other, the child's immersion drops more and more (Ward, Levinson and Wackman, 1972). So the question remains: how effective is it to spend millions of dollars on TV ads targeted at kids? What, of all the stimuli they receive, do they actually retain and later convert into a purchase at the retail?

On another hand, previous studies suggest that packaging has the power to evoke images of its products, brand names and other salient product features from the memories of children. There are two categories of packaging elements affecting consumer purchase decisions which are usually grouped into visual and informational elements (Silayoi and Speece, 2007). Visual elements refer to size/shape, graphics, colors utilized, brand name, etc. while information elements are related to product information and information about technologies used in the package. Studies indicate that children recalled both visual and informational elements equally well and that there was no difference between older and younger children (Monali Hota Karine Charry, 2014). Furthermore, it was found that the use of just visual and child-oriented elements would be enough to trigger a purchase influence motivation for children. Adding informational elements actually decreased purchase influence as it was seen as an overload of information. However, there is no discussion in the importance that packaging has in positioning the brand and influencing the moment of purchase.

Finally, we know for a fact that children visit stores from early infancy. Between the age of three and seven, they view stores egocentrically as places to fulfill their one-dimensional desire of simply wanting a particular sweet or toy

(McNeal, 1964) (Roedder-John, 1999). This depicts that children explore the retail point at a very young age and whatever experience they receive is going to have a great influence. In-store activities such as BTL campaigns inside the retail, POP material and package design, all contribute to achieving the desired atmosphere inside the store and will intend to generate a unique experience. In this sense, retailers design or redesign their stores using different aspects of store environment such as color, music, architecture, scent and lighting, even using the latest interactive technology to make their store more appealing to children (Kafia Ayadi, NEOMA Business School, 2004). Everything that makes up the experience at the retail will definitely have an influence on the shopper's purchase and this is why companies continue to invest in this kind of activities.

In this paper we will go through various studies on these matters with the objective of comparing and contrasting the relative effect of packaging, in-store activities and traditional TV advertisements when targeting children in the food industry, and we will intend to provide recommendations for different business issues with children as consumers.

THE INFLUENCE OF TV ADVERTISEMENTS

We are all affected by advertisement. At this point of the century, this is a statement nobody can deny. Whether conscious or unconsciously, every day men and women of all age groups all around the world, are impacted by the effect of brands in our life; from the tooth paste we pick up as soon as we wake up, to the coffee we choose to drink, the clothes we wear and the

every sign we cross on the street when wandering around the city. It influences us in many ways; no one is immune (Raju and Subhash C. Lonial, 2006). Moreover, children are known to be one of the heaviest TV consumer groups exposing them to a vast amount of information about every-day products during the commercials time period. A study performed by Leonhardt and (Kerwin, 1997) suggested that children between the ages of 6 and 14 watch about 25 hours of television per week and are exposed to as many as 20,000 commercials in a single year (Leonhardt and Kerwin, 1997). In this sense, it is of common knowledge that leader companies of the food industry (such as Kellogg, Danone, Pepsico, etc.) invest enormous sums of money every year in advertising their products targeted at kids, aiming at building on certain brand credentials that will eventually capitalize at the point of sale into an incremental purchase. In 2002, approximately \$15 billion was spent in the U.S.A. on food marketing campaigns directly targeted at children (Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2003) and this figure is probably representative of what has continued to happen around the world in the last decade. Also, there are numerous studies about the influence that advertising campaigns have on children's future behaviors and, although hard to prove, the general belief is that there is a strong link between these two variables:

the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) has recently issued a detailed report arguing that growing health problems such as childhood obesity and poor diets can be linked to the advertising of high fat, high sugar foods aimed at this young audience (Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2003). Finally, all of these enduring concerns encouraged substantial amounts of research in the 1970s and early 1980s, focusing mainly on the impact of advertisement. However, considerably less research attention has been dedicated to this topic in recent years, despite the growth in marketing communications now targeting children (Elizabeth S. Moore, 2004).

In order to understand children behavior, it is necessary that we refer to the longstanding, but still very relevant, Theory of Cognitive Development, first developed by Piaget in 1970 and later re-modeled by (Deborah Roedder John, 1999). This theory has broadly been used by many researchers on children as consumers and it states that from birth and throughout all of their childhood, children experience different stages in consumer socialization which can be roughly clustered into 3 age groups, which occur in the context of dramatic cognitive and social developments, as children mature throughout childhood" (John, 1999).

A description of the different stages in consumer socialization as described by John is shown below in Table 1:

audience for marketers to target as they will not apply a rational analysis of what they are seeing. 72 children participated in the

CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION STAGES			
Characteristics	Perceptual stage, 3-7 years	Analytical stage, 7-11 years	Reflective stage, 11-16 years
Knowledge structures:			
Orientation	Concrete	Abstract	Abstract
Focus	Perceptual features	Functional/underlying features	Functional/underlying features
Complexity	Unidimensional	Two or more dimensions	Multidimensional
	Simple	Contingent ("if-then")	Contingent ("if-then")
Perspective	Egocentric (own perspective)	Dual perspectives (own + others)	Dual perspectives in social context
Decision-making and influence strategies:			
Orientation	Expedient	Thoughtful	Strategic
Focus	Perceptual features	Functional/underlying features	Functional/underlying features
Complexity	Salient features	Relevant features	Relevant features
	Single attributes	Two or more attributes	Multiple attributes
Adaptivity	Limited repertoire of strategies	Expanded repertoire of strategies	Complete repertoire of strategies
	Emerging	Moderate	Fully developed
Perspective	Egocentric	Dual perspectives	Dual perspectives in social context

Table 1: John's consumer socialization stages

We have reviewed the existing bibliography on research done on advertising to children and analyzed it in the light of John's consumer socialization stages. The three stages proposed by John are seen directly reflected in the impact that advertising has on children of diverse age groups, as different intellectual development leads to different appreciation of advertising.

To begin with, at the perceptual stage (ages 3 to 7) kids are driven by perceptual, unidimensional features. There is no notion of cause and consequence and ideas are disorganized and not linearly related. When exposed to a stimulus, the child will engage in a very superficial level by evaluating if he or she likes what they see or not. Research has therefore shown that when exposed to advertising, younger children have been found to hold more positive attitudes, to be more likely to believe its claims, and to be less likely to understand its essential purpose, as compared to older kids (Elizabeth S. Moore, 2004). Children are therefore a more gullible

research held by Moore and Lutz in 2007 and the results obtained indicate that for children belonging to John's perceptual stage of consumer socialization, the liking of the Ad had a direct influence on their attitude towards the brand but in a very simple processing manner. The younger children did not engage in much elaboration, as only the simple, direct effects of ad liking on brand attitudes were evident (Moore and Lutz, 2007). Also, in relation to this simplistic appreciation of the advertisement exposed, the discussion in the in-depth interviews held by the researcher after the contact with the commercial, it seems the younger children's reports revolved constantly around the reference to the product sold and allusions to the fact that they either already knew the snack or cereal that was being sold or wanted to try it in the future. Here, it would appear that a successful commercial from the younger child's perspective would be one that would attract his or her attention to the product itself and to the enjoyment or benefits to be

gained from personal use experiences with that product (Elizabeth S. Moore, 2004).

When young kids were stimulated with product trial in a time period subsequent to the exposure to the advertisement, there appeared to be no evidence of a prior ad framing process. The experiment exposed that initial experience with the advertising did little to change the younger children's perceptions of a product trial experience (Moore and Lutz, 2007). This reinforces the idea presented by John, where children of young age do not possess the capability of associating recent events, and in fact reveals that kids in this age group do not fully comprehend the meaning behind TV advertisements.

Contrarily, for older children (aged 10-12-year-olds in Moore's study and belonging to John's analytical stage) it appears that due to their more advanced cognitive capabilities and their past experience they present a much more critical approach when presented with a TV commercial. They reveal a higher language capacity and a broader and richer set of comments and insights on advertising and products (Elizabeth S. Moore, 2004). Moreover, it appears they readily acknowledge that advertising does not always tell the truth and are more likely to express skeptical views toward the institution of advertising (e.g., (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994), (Rossiter 1979) (Ward, Wackman, and Wartella 1977). In this sense, older children showed to consume ads in a similar way to which adults consume a television program: through a critical and holistic approach, regardless of the specific product that is being shown. The children of this age group were not only attracted by the creativity techniques used, but also presented critical analysis on how the ads were constructed and what they were trying to convey.

Furthermore, in Moore and Lutz's research, one of the interviewed children said:

“The Honey Comb commercial has never left my head because it's got all those details in it. It's got bright colors, and music, and kids with interesting things in it. That's what makes it stay in my head. I don't like that kind of cereal or the new kinds. I don't like sweet cereal. I just like the commercials though”. (507, F)

As observed, for this older age group the appreciation of the advertisement occurs in a much more complete and organized manner. Thus, the older children's increased cognitive sophistication, knowledge and experience with advertising extends their openness to commercial content (Moore, 2004). Moreover, it has been proven that in this age group, advertisement frames the appreciation of the product in the child's future interactions, hence becoming a powerful tool in order to begin to build brand credentials. However, older kids also become very critical and skeptical of the advertisements they see, as they increasingly gain knowledge on what advertisements are intending to do.

THE INFLUENCE OF IN-STORE ACTIVITIES AND THE IMPACT OF PRODUCT PACKAGING

Food companies today cleverly use in-store tactics to create visual appeal, attract children's attention, and build brand loyalty as a marketing tool to entice consumers (parents and children) and buy a product at the point of sale.

Cross-promotions, with popular TV and movie characters is used to a great extent to enhance the marketing of food

products targeting children. This is proven to be a very successful and appealing tactic. Kellogg's Frosted Flakes grew its market share by using cartoon characters like Nickelodeon's Sponge Bob Square Pants and Tony the Tiger, mainly to get children to know the cereal and favor it over the others (YTV Report 2008). Similarly, the Ronald McDonald character is used to sell the McDonald's brand, including Happy Meals, and has recently taken on a new role as a physical fitness guru.

In-store marketing activities such as point-of-purchase displays and promotions, through background music and supportive store personnel are all instrumental in both winning children's hearts and encouraging them to come again (Gutierrez, 2004). Color, music, architecture, scent and lighting, even using the latest interactive technology is used extensively to make stores more appealing to children. (McSpadden, M., Calvert, S.L., 2015). Celebrity pictures of endorsements in the shop also help sell products. But then again: does it really influence the child's mind? Is it retained? According to a particular study by Sandra L. Calvert, when children enter the store, they observe atmospheric features, footprints on the ground, lamps, the table and chairs, music, the playhouse and so on. However, most of them pay no attention to the products. For children, purchasing is secondary: they prefer the hedonic, experiential aspect of the store. On another note Sandra L. Calvert (2015) also mentions that marketing practices such as repetition, branded environments, and free prizes are effective in a way in attracting children's attention, probably making products remain in their memory, and influencing their purchasing choices (Sandra L. Calvert, 2015)

Other activities like Product premiums are in the form of bonus toys and treats. It is proven that this has also

have increased children's product requests within the store in the past years. (Marshall, 2014) Sweepstakes and contests promise children opportunities to win free products which is a very popular custom (National Council of Better Business Bureaus, 2003). Premiums can increase short-term sales since children may desire the item over the food, but they also can help elevate the image of that brand in children's minds (Paramount Market Publishing, 1999). For instance, Charles Aitken found that 81% of mothers thought that premiums influenced their children's cereal selections. The more children watched Saturday morning television programs, which are saturated with cereal commercials, the more children wanted the cereals that contained premiums. According to the 2008 *YTV Kids and Tweens Report*, kids influence: Breakfast choices (97% of the time) and lunch choices (95% of the time), where to go for casual family meals (98% of the time) (with 34% of kids always having a say on the choice of casual restaurant). Here children are able to influence the decision as they have their own point of view which has bloomed due to the retention of the brand due to the premium. Cross-selling and tie-ins also combine promotional efforts to sell a product and it is proven to be a fruitful tactic in the US, the food industry has forged promotional links with Hollywood and Network studios, toy companies, and sports leagues. Burger King has formed a linkage with Nickelodeon, and McDonald's with the Fox Kids Network. Burger King has sold chicken nuggets shaped like Teletubbies and Disney has launched cross-selling campaigns and tie-ins worth millions of dollars to promote its films and characters.

On another hand, packaging is a powerful tool which can evoke images of its products, brand names and salient features in the minds of consumers. According to (Silayoi and Speece, 2007), there are four

main packaging elements potentially affecting consumer purchase decisions, which can be separated into two categories; visual and informational elements. Visual elements refer to size/shape, colors used, graphics, brand name, etc. while informational elements include product information and information about the technologies used in the package. According to John's stages of cognitive development and the work of (Rubin, 1974), (McNeal and Ji, 2003), almost all children in the study (aged between 7 and 11) were able to recall and reflect the true dimensions of cereal boxes. Also, children across several age groups were more likely to recall visual imagery of a product, although there were significant differences in the amount of recall of younger and older children. Similarly, children were less likely to recall informational elements like names of cereal producers, nutritional information, ingredients, etc. These findings are consistent with those of Van Evra (1995) who states that the amount of information remembered is relative to the relevance of the information. Thus, if a child does not perceive nutritional information as being relevant to him, the amount of recall for it will be relatively low.

Children only consider specific elements of packaging (John, 1999, 2008). Elements like size/shape and graphics play an important role. As the child gets to touch and feel the product, desirable packaging can initiate play and develop a favorable attitude towards the product. Characters used by brands on the packaging of products also helps to increase interaction with children (Roberts, 2005). The stories told by the brands' characters on advertisements are at the root of the positive influences. Berry and McMullen (2008) suggest that the use of premiums or child incentives on the packages of breakfast cereal boxes is a form

of child-oriented marketing that attracts children. A study of parents and children shopping together found that almost half of the children making product purchase requests in the cereal aisle were influenced by premium offers (Kunkel, 2001). According to a survey conducted by Hill and Tilley (2002), age does not play a major part in influencing children's purchase decisions as a majority of ten to eleven year olds eat a wide range of cereals despite being told that these are for much younger children. They take into account visual elements and not informational elements while purchasing products (Van Evra, 1995)

Despite visual elements being quite sufficient to induce children into buying products, it is not sufficient to convince mothers (Monali Hota, Karine Charry, 2014). Mothers take into account several informational elements (ingredients, nutritional value, etc.) before buying products. Hence, informational elements should not be simply disregarded as excess information, but should be given in a balanced way with visual elements to ensure successful packaging. Also, older children (those over 7 years of age) take into account things apart from visual elements while purchasing products. Hence, a balanced packaging strategy will satisfy both children and parents, thus giving maximum profits to the marketer. Packaging is a very effective tool for targeting children and should hence, not be wasted.

To conclude, we propose the following framework in order to explain how the stages of the child's socialization process will moderate the relative influence that either advertisement or in-store impact has on the child. This will ultimately result in the degree in which he or she is impacted as a consumer which will finally convert into a purchase of our product as is explained below in Figure 1:

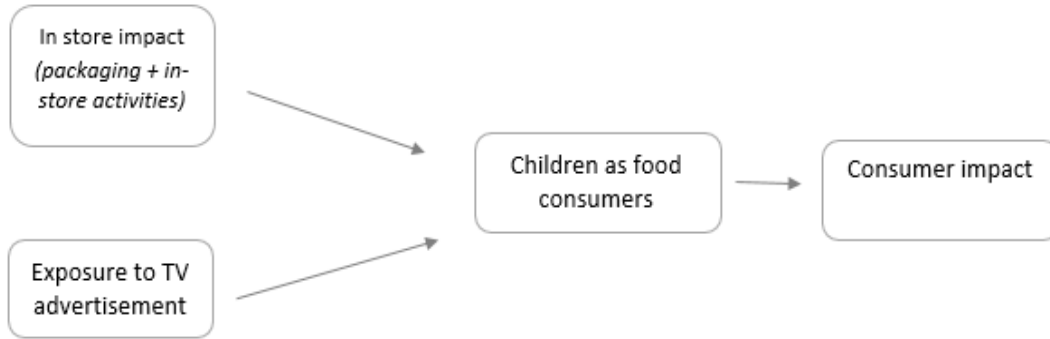


Figure 1: A model of the influence of advertisement and in-store impact.

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

As explored, various authors have explored in the impact that advertisement, packaging and in-store triggers have on kids. While Moore and Lutz (2007) have done extensive research on children in relation to advertising experiences with different age groups, we also find many other authors of high caliber such as John (1999,

2008), Roberts (2005), Berry and McMullen (2008) among others, who have thoroughly studied the impact that children are faced with when entering a retail store, affected by aspects such as product packaging, POP material and general ambience of the store. Moreover, most of these revisions have been done within the framework of children's cognitive development theories, either by Piaget (1970) or by John (1999) in her consumer socialization model. Research has also been done on the relative influence of consumer socialization agents on children (Monali Hota, Robyn McGuiggan, 2006) with the objective of understanding the

extent to which the different agents affecting children will affect the process of consumer socialization.

However, although there has been extensive research on many of the topics explored in this paper we have identified a gap in connecting all of this information in order to better understand the degree in which the child will be impacted as a consumer by all the differences stimuli he or she receives. In this sense, the available bibliography enables us in having a deep understanding of the impact that either television advertisements or in-store impacts (understood as product packaging and in-store activities) but has failed to contrast these components of the marketing mix in order to conclude in the relative influence that they will have on the targeted group of children.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been proven that food advertising is clearly an important source of information and influence for children (Moore and Lutz 2000), that packaging is a critical factor in the consumer decision-making process for children (Silayoi and Speece, 2007) and that retailers are

recommended to attempt to create a fun atmosphere in their stores, since children consider the store as a place of entertainment and are more interested in playing than in purchasing; a fun atmosphere will attract children and keep them in the store longer (Kafia AYADI, Lanlan CAO, NEOMA Business School). However, in this paper we have explored that each of these aspects of the marketing mix have a relative influence on children and that this will depend highly on the stage of consumer socialization that the child is in. In other words, in reviewing the framework presented we have understood that both aspects of the marketing mix will undeniably affect children as food consumers but this impact will be moderated according to the stage of consumer socialization the child is in. Further, this will result in a different degree of consumer impact according to the age of the child, and the final outcome will either be a purchase influence (if it is finally converted into a sale) or a purchase intention (if the stimulus has impacted the child in a way that may trigger a purchase in the future). This can be seen in the following reviewed model of

in the analytical stage (ages 7 to 11). This, as has been explored in this analysis, is due to their different cognitive skills: younger kids do not have the capability of understanding the meaning of TV advertisements and therefore do not understand that the food product that is shown is actually for sale. They will evaluate the advertisement according to how engaging and entertaining it was for them, but this doesn't appear to have a direct influence on their perception of the product or brand. In the experiment conducted by Moore and Lutz (2007), the children were given a food product (cereal) to try after having been exposed to the TV commercial and the in-depth interviews conducted later showed that the child did not relate the product to the ad. However, when the children's behavior was analyzed inside the retail, we have seen that both packaging and any other in-store stimulus directly influences the kid into wanting to purchase that particular food product. Colorful packs, lights, POP material and even product premiums inside the packs are all agents that impact young children at the POS resulting in a high degree of purchase intention for

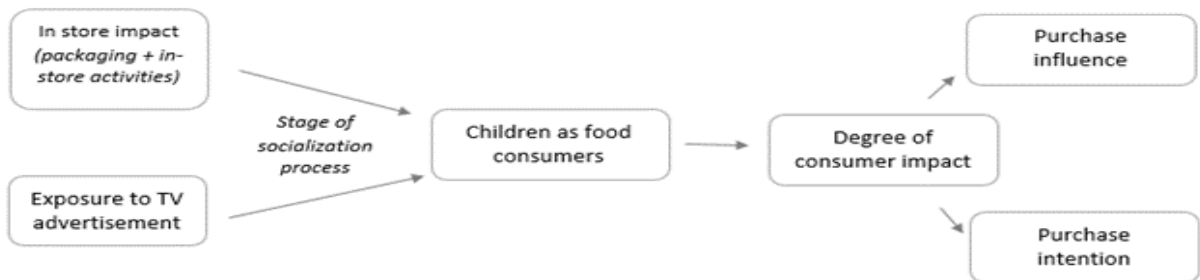


Figure 2: The model of relative influence of advertisement vs. in-store impact.

relative influence of advertisement vs. in-store impact:

Moreover, we have understood that children in John's perceptual stage (ages 3 to 7) will be impacted by food advertisements in a lower degree than those

this age group.

On the other hand, this behavior differs vastly when considering children in John's more advanced analytical stage. Children of ages 7 to 11 have developed the ability to analyze things in a multi-dimensional way, understanding cause and

consequence and thinking of both the functional and the underlying features of the things they see. In this sense, children in this age group have developed the knowledge of what an advertisement is and therefore understand that the product they are witnessing is for sale and that they can therefore demand it to their parents if it is something they like. However, this does come associated to a general skepticism about advertising as many of the children reported that TV commercials tended to be exaggerated. Once children understand the persuasive purpose of advertising they become more skeptical and are then capable of resisting its appeal (Moore and Lutz, 2007). Nonetheless, this effect seems to be mitigated in this age group when experiencing in-store stimuli. Here, research shows that, as observed and already detailed for children in perceptual stage, children of over 7 years old in analytical stage also appear to be highly impacted by their experience in the retail store and a colorful packaging, with high probability of this being capitalized in a purchase.

Finally, through this analysis we have concluded that the degree of the consumer impact that the different stimuli will have on children as food consumers will be relative and will depend highly on the stage of socialization process that they are in. The effect of TV advertisements in building brand credentials and influencing in potential purchases at the POS will be relatively lower than the in-store impacts for children in a more premature cognitive development stage. Further, for older children with developed analytical skills, both of these marketing tools have a strong influence and will be useful in building brand loyalty and boosting sales.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Finally, research on the relative influence of television advertisements vs in-store stimuli should be completed through a quantitative- qualitative study to enrich the interpretative qualities of the data and to make it more accurate. Considerations on cultural and socio-economic background should also be taken into consideration as research has shown variation due to these characteristics (P.S. Raju and Subhash C. Lonial). Controlling these variables will ensure a holistic approach to the matter. Moreover, the booming of social media in the last decade has been a game-changer in the design of marketing campaigns and has challenged the way and moment consumers are targeted. In this sense, with social media and on-line gaming children are now-a-days also influenced by brands while sitting in the car and this could present a whole new edge to this study. Advertisement in social media may act neither an at-home nor in-store stimuli and could indeed result in different conclusions to this study. Finally, the scope of this analysis is to understand the underlying psychology of kids as food consumers but escapes the study of the impact that the child's demand will have on the parents. In this sense, the ultimate shopper is the mother/father who is shopping at the retail outlet and there might be various different factors that will affect the final conversion into a purchase of the product.

All of this complementary work to this paper could result in very rich information for food companies all around the world in the attempt for better targeting children as food consumers.

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