

Review of Effects, Strategies, and Tactics

Food Advertising Directed at Children



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Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems

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Foreword

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About the Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity

This Coalition is part of CLASP (Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention) of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. The program of activities titled 'Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity' (CACO) will be carried out from October 2009 through March 2012.

The CACO project is made up of six national, provincial, and territorial partners who bring to the project expertise in regards to policy, research, prevention/promotion, and clinical practice:

- **Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada**
- **Childhood Obesity Foundation**
- **University of Ottawa**
- **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Quebec**
- **Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems**
- **Government of the Northwest Territories**

The objective of this Coalition is to reverse the growing trend of obesity in children by reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) and time spent by youths in front of TV and computer screens. The CACO project aims at making low nutritional value food less seductive and less accessible, while increasing the presence of healthy alternatives in children's environments. In partnership with three northern First Nations communities, land based health strategies are also being developed to reduce the prevalence of obesity and obesity related diseases.

Within the CACO project, the Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems (Weight Coalition) plays a knowledge transfer role with the five other partner organizations, especially on advertising directed to children. Quebec has had a law prohibiting advertising directed at children since the beginning of the 1980's and the Weight Coalition has filed several complaints under this law. It has a great deal of experience on this subject and is an important ally for other Canadian provinces wishing to implement similar regulatory measures. As part of the project on preventing child obesity, the Weight Coalition commissioned this review of impacts, strategies, and tactics of marketing to children.

About the Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems

Created in 2006 and sponsored by the Association pour la santé publique du Québec since 2008, the Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems is working toward the adoption of specific public policies in regard to weight related issues. It acts within three strategic areas (agri-food industry, sociocultural and built environment) to foster the development of environments that enable healthy choices and prevent weight related issues.

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Tables	5
1. Introduction	6
2. The Economic Market of Children	8
2.1. Companies and Children	10
2.2. Brand Recognition and Fashion.....	11
2.3. Advertising Expenses Related to Children.....	11
3. Children’s Eating Habits	12
3.1. Obesity Rates and Eating Habits.....	13
4. Advertising and Obesity around the World	14
5. The Persuasive Aspect of Advertising to Children	14
6. Children’s Influencing Power in the Family Environment	15
6.1. The Nature of the Products	17
6.2. The Act of Buying and Related Behavioral Roles.....	18
7. Communication Strategies	19
7.1. Product Placement	19
7.2. Sponsorship	20
7.3. Promotion.....	20
7.4. Fictitious Characters	21
8. Strategies Related to the Various Media	22
8.1. Television.....	23
8.2. Internet.....	28
8.3. School	29
8.4. Grocery Stores.....	30
9. Marketing Techniques	32
9.1. Children Aged 3 to 7	32
9.2. Fun Food.....	32
9.3. Effects of Commercial Advertising on Children.....	33
9.4. Marketing Techniques around the World	34
9.5. From Push to Pull	34
10. Regulations and Jurisdictions	34
10.1. Canada.....	35
10.2. Quebec	36
10.3. International.....	36
11. Healthy Food Products	37
12. Educating Children about Advertising	37
12.1. Educational Games.....	38
13. Conclusion	38
Bibliography	39
Appendix A	45

List of Tables

Table 1 Purchases made by children (aged 4 to 12) Category spent in percentage (\$billion).....	8
Table 2 Children and the recommendations from Canada’s Food Guide	12
Table 3 The child’s influence according to the product category.....	17
Table 4 Expenses of children aged 4to 12 , globally.....	18
Table 5 Overweight children and television.....	26
Table 6 Effects of commercial advertising on children.....	33
Table 7 SOM survey for the Weight Coalition in 2007	37

Food Marketing and Children

Clearly advertising tends to affect knowledge, preferences and behaviour of its target market since that is the reason for doing it (Livingstone, 2004: 9).

Advertising produced by the agri-food industry could influence eating habits for young children (Hastings & al., 2003). The logic behind any advertising is quite simple: it tries to “meet consumer needs and create new ones” (Renaud, 2007, p. 153). In 2007, the Institut national de prévention et d’éducation pour la santé (INPES) revealed that 47% of French kids (aged eight to fourteen) said that the ads they watched encouraged them to eat or drink (Laperrière & al., 2010: 163).

1. Introduction

For decades, advertising has been omnipresent in our visual and acoustic environments. As more and more products become available in the market, advertising’s purpose is to raise awareness about them among potential consumers: “Using various advertising strategies, the media increase temptation and create a need by giving products a certain representation which has a significant and specific appeal: they seduce” (Laperrière, 2009: 3).

Advertising was qualified by McLuhan as the greatest art form of the 20th century: “Advertising is a communication activity whose goal is essentially to forge the brand image of a product or service” (Cossette, 2001: 17).

In North America, approximately \$14 billion are invested annually in advertising directed at children. Globally, young people represent a market of \$600 billion per year (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 9). As well, \$3 billion in pocket money are spent by children each year in Canada. In France, \$15 billion are spent by children annually (Minot, 2002: 15).

From a marketing point of view, youths are a target of choice for marketing specialists. For the purposes of this report, we will focus on the following definition of marketing:

~~the~~**The** process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. Marketing is thus a broad process that includes market research, distribution, pricing, packaging, product development, advertising, promotions and public relations (World Health Organization [WHO], 2007: 15).

Also, the definition of the term child for this report will be as follows: “Boy or girl of childhood age (aged 0 to 13 – which includes various childhood stages). A person considered to be linked through their origins to a being, to a thing” (Larousse 2003). Yet, a study conducted by the World Health Organization addresses the fact that it is difficult to define the term “child” since its connotation changes depending on the country and its regulations. Dr Corinna Hawkes, author of that report, states:

Critical to any regulation concerning marketing to children is the definition of a “child”. Although often assumed to be an issue of age, many regulations do not actually define upper age limits. In addition, there is some debate about the applicability of age as a determinant. [...] When specified in national broadcast legislation, the definition of a “child” typically ranges from under 12 years of age to under 16 years (see Table 1). Thus even if a regulation on marketing to children is similar within a group of countries, it may apply to different age groups. Furthermore, regulations on different forms of marketing (e.g., advertising and sales promotions) in the same country may apply to different age groups. (WHO, 2007: 15-16).

The persuasive aspect of advertising assumes full meaning when one looks at the child’s perspective. Children have great confidence in advertising. They do not always understand its persuasive dimension. Because they do not have the ability to detect this dimension, children are more vulnerable when it comes to advertising (Kapferer, 1985: 142). They are more affected by the pleasure advertising brings them, whether through the music featured or the direction (Laperrière, 2009: 68). The pleasure that is experienced therefore influences their consumption choices.

Young people express their desire for independence at a very early age (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 9). As part of a study, researchers observed a group of children up to their adolescence in order to evaluate their choices in terms of brands. Half the brands selected once they had reached adolescence were already the subjects’ number one choice during childhood (Minot, 2002: 61). In fact, by age 10, a child has memorized between 300 and 400 product brands (Lebel & al., 2005: 3).

In the food industry, 67% of children make demands to get specific products when they visit the grocery store with their parents (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 9). Children are exposed to advertising. Now, “it has been shown that children who watch television the most choose the least nutritional between two products. In Quebec for example, 73% of food products that are advertised during peak viewing times are not part of *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. This is definitely cause for concern”. (Laurendeau and Marquez, 2006). The WHO has also released research results which show that the marketing of unhealthy food contributes to an: “obesogenic environment which makes choosing healthy foods more challenging, especially among children”. (WHO, 2007: 12):

Over the last decade, food and beverage products targeted to children have increased and these products are dominated by foods that are high in calories, sugars, salt, fat and low in nutrients (McGinnis et al., 2006). A scan of new product introductions in the U.S. over the last ten years found that the majority of new food products that target children and adolescents were candies, chewing gum, snacks and cookies (63%). By comparison, only 27% of new food products targeted to the general market fit the categories of candies, snacks, cookies, and ice cream. Of the 3,936 new children’s food products introduced in the U.S. between 1994 and 2004, only 41 were fruits and 11 were vegetables. (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2007 : 4-5).

Agri-food marketing could therefore have an impact on weight. The relation between an increase in the childhood obesity rate and agri-food marketing has not been clearly established. However, studies such as those conducted by the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) note the significant marketing efforts made within the fast food industry (WHO, 2007: 12). The definition of the term *junk food* helps to better understand the type of food advertised to children. “Foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt and of low nutritional value, usually considered as being bad for your health, are often categorized as junk food.” (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 9).

The WHO speaks freely about junk food, without providing a specific definition of the term. In the absence of a specific framework, general consensus has not yet been reached regarding the definition of this term, coined in 1979 by the French scientist Joël deRosnay. This fact is often a problem for nutritionists, healthcare professionals, as well as legislators, in the development of strategies or recommendations aiming to eliminate these types of foods (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 9).

2. The Economic Market of Children

As previously mentioned, children are targets for agri-food companies. Every year in the U.S., children spend \$200 billion in pocket money and these expenses are mostly related to food products (Harris & al., 2009: 212):

Table 1
Purchases made by children (aged 4 to 12)
Category spent in percentage (\$billion)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food and Beverage: \$7.7 (33%)• Toys: \$6.5 (28%)• Clothing: \$3.6 (15%)• Movies/Sports: \$2.0 (8%)• Video Arcades: \$1.3 (6%)• Other: \$2.3 (10%) <p>(Wootan, 2003: 2)</p>
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Moreover, children aged 4 to 12 spend and control \$24 billion of all annual purchases. A third of this money is directly spent on food and beverages (Wootan, 2003: 2). Children therefore have a greater purchasing power than one could imagine:

According to the program *Enjeux*, broadcast in January 2007:

- In 2006, children in Canada spent close to \$3 billion in pocket money.
- In 2004, children in Canada influenced their parents' purchases to the amount of \$20 billion.
- According to the Youth Media Alliance, it would be wrong to assume that the absence of advertising revenues would have a catastrophic effect on the quality of children's programming. In Quebec, though the absence of advertising has worked against the industry, it did not have the feared effects on programs (Briefing note by the Weight Coalition).

By the time they are 5 years old, children have seen an average of more than 4,000 television commercials for food annually.ⁱ (Anderson, 2010). Food advertising focuses mainly on unhealthy and non-nutritious food. Also, advertisers target programs that are created especially for children (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 16). Sugar-sweetened cereal and candy are among the *Top 5* of the most advertised products. (Harris & al., 2009: 7).

ⁱ By the time they are 5 years old, children have seen an average of more than 4,000 television commercials for food annually (ANDERSON, *ScienceDaily*, 2010.).

A study conducted by Yale University has shown that the cereal that is advertised to children generally contain 85% more sugar, 65% less fibre and 60% more sodium than the cereal advertised to adults (Harris & al., 2009: 2). It does not come as a surprise that cereal companies spend \$156 million annually on advertising. Preschoolers see 642 cereal ads on average, per year, on television only. As for the Internet, General Mills has recorded an average of 767,000 monthly visits by young children. These cereal products are mainly associated with games that may be found on the website, which encourages the child to associate the consumption of the product with fun (Harris & al., 2009: 2).

In Canada, children have influenced family purchases to the amount of \$20 billion in 2004 (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 25). For this reason, “advertising directed at North American children reached \$2 billion in 1996, i.e. more than 20 times the amounts spent for the same purposes 10 years earlier” (Reese, 1996). In the technological era in which our children are growing up now, they do not only spend on-site, in shopping centres for example, but they buy more and more online, as well (APMCC, 2006 : 16). According to a report by Option consommateurs: “Between the ages of 8 and 14, 92% of their purchase requests will be especially related to brands. Also, 89% of children claim they want to be loyal to the brands they like”. (2008: 9).

Slowly, the influencing power has been shifting within the family model since the nineties. A study conducted by Minot finds that children now influence 43% of family purchases (2002: 15):

For companies, young people evoke three different markets in one. First, they themselves embody a market, since they know what they want to buy. Secondly, they influence their parents for the purchase of certain products and services. Finally, they represent the future market, because when a child develops his tastes very early on, chances are that they will remain loyal to their consumption choices. Therefore, their buying power is increasingly significant and should not be taken lightly (2008: 9).

Advertisers are aware of the impact of the child during the family decision process. This impact is reflected in family purchases. Advertisers work to target children directly since they will then influence parents when purchasing food. Also, they make requests after having watched a food ad. Advertisements help in easily associating with the product image. Then, children claim it as soon as they see it on the grocery store displays (Kapferer, 1985: 118).

This child impact factor is highly linked to the change in the family dynamic, according to Dagnaud. It: “also highlights how much the family model and, within it, the child’s place, has changed”. (Dagnaud, 2003: 48). It shows how children are over-valued and parental authority is undermined. Codes are becoming blurry, which is also reflected in the advertising arena (Dagnaud, 2003: 51). During the eighties, ads were mainly created for adults and at the turn of the nineties, this target became children (Dagnaud, 2003: 49).

Children may not have as much economic power as adults, but they definitely have a say when it comes to family purchases: “According to the IED, child recommendations (up to 10 years old) reach about 68% for dairy products, 65% for candy, 40% for the type of vacation and even 19% and 11% for the clothing chosen by the mother and father”. (Guichard, 2000: 14). In Canada only, children influenced family purchases to the amount of \$20 billion in 2004 (*Enjeux*, 2007). Youths do have significant influencing power with regard to food consumption. In this context: “agri-food companies regularly target children in their advertising.” (Laperrière, 2009; Minot, 2002; & Dagnaud, 2003).

2.1. Companies and Children

Companies are very interested in children as consumers. Kids “are seen as multi-taskers, risk takers, explorers, early adopters of new technology and looking to make a personal statement.” (McCullough & Pouvreau-Miles, 2006). Companies are aware that marketing directed at those age groups is key. This is why they conduct a lot of research to determine what children like:

Marketers employ child psychologists, cultural anthropologists, review academic literature on child development, send experts into homes, stores and fast food restaurants, organize focus groups, study children's drawings, dreams and fantasy lives, and apply the findings to ads and product designs. (PHAC, 2007: 4).

Because children are more easily impressionable, it is more difficult for companies to maintain and establish a long term relationship (Schor, 2004). McNeal claims that children will be familiar with approximately 200 product brands before starting first grade: “Ronald McDonald’s face is recognized by nearly 96% of American children (Enrico, 1999). Even young children are familiar with McDonald’s logo, the golden arches.” (McNeal, 1999) Indeed, we address the importance of fictitious characters in marketing below.

Companies spend millions of dollars per year in marketing. For example, McDonald’s spent \$723 million in marketing only in 2004 (Lang & al., 2006). To reach children on a larger scale, they form alliances, also called cross-promotions, with other companies such as toy companies, film production companies and sports leagues: “An analysis of promotions for a new children’s movie, Shrek the Third, found 17 separate food promotions linked to the movie. The promotions represented 75 different processed food products including McDonald’s Happy Meals, Kellogg’s Froot Loops cereal and Kellogg’s Frosted S’Mores Pop Tarts.” (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, 2007). Cross promotions or tie-in promotions are very popular now and may double or even triple the volume of weekly sales of children’s meals (Schlosser, 2001). According to a report from the Public Health Agency of Canada, McDonald’s perfected the tie-in promotion strategy. This promotional tactic, used by the fast food chain, has been recognized as one of the five greatest marketing accomplishments of the 20th century (PHAC, 2007: 7).

Another example of cross promotion involves the affiliation of the fast food chain KFC to the popular video game Guitar Hero. This video game allows players to (relatively) move while they are having fun (which is rarer with this type of game). The KFC chain was therefore offering, in 2008, meals called “The Loaded Box Meal”, since this meal contained 1210 calories. It included a 32 ounce soft drink served in a collectible “Guitar Hero” glass, chicken fingers, one piece of dark meat chicken, a chicken sandwich called the “Snacker”, two side dishes, and a cookie. This rich meal was also served in a cardboard box with Guitar Hero graphics (CHOW, 2008).

Therefore, to successfully attract young people, companies choose a combination of various methods including contests and games, toys, the playground, the use of fictitious or popular characters, the use of different attractive colours, etc. (International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, 2003: 16):

Using these other means provides numerous promotion opportunities among children, ensures a frequent exposure to the brand and often associates the product with experiences which contribute to brand awareness and loyalty. Ads in magazines disguised as editorial content; clothes, toys and books featuring logos; contests, advertising tricks and purchase gifts are other practices commonly used by advertisers to reach children. (APMCC, 2006 : 16).

2.2. Brand Recognition and Fashion

Among the various brands on the many markets, the brands that are most often recognized are fast food chain brands (92.9%). The most well-known brand however is food industry giant McDonald's. (Wiley InterScience, 2010: 208) It will not come as a surprise that a study about brand recognition by children claims that they have less difficulty recognizing the brands they are interested in: "Brands for which children are the primary target segment will inevitably be marketed more directly to children. When messages are tailored to captivate children's attention, information may be more easily processed and stored, thereby increasing children's subsequent brand recognition." (Wiley InterScience, 2010: 221).

It seems that infants as young as 6 months old are able to form mental images of logos and mascots. Furthermore, loyalty to a brand may be established by children as young as 2 years old (mamanpourlavie.com, n.d.). Children recognize brands through the various characteristics of their packaging or their logo. For example, attractive and vibrant colours, shapes and fictitious characters allow children to recognize the brand and to ask their parents for it (International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, 2003: 16).

Also, brands are requested according to their popularity. At the early age of three, children begin judging their peers based on their consumption habits and the products they use:

The present results show that children as young as 3 willingly judge their peers. They see other children as popular or unpopular, fun or boring, because of the brands they use. Such judgments suggest that, at an early age, children attribute great importance to the use of branded products to cultivate and promote self-image. (Wiley InterScience, 2010: 221-224).

This fashion phenomenon may also be observed in the food industry and the same study found that children's eating habits are greatly influenced by this brand phenomenon (Wiley InterScience, 2010: 221-224). Children use brands to identify products which would be more likely to be tasty and fun. Food products consumed are also a reflection of their own image:

[...]The data show that this sample of 3 to 5-year-olds tended to judge fast food as fun, exciting, and tasty. Cola brands were often reported to be fun "because the drinks are fizzy," "the bubbles are fun," and "lots of people like them." These findings suggest that values associated with food choices are formed early in life. (Wiley InterScience, 2010: 224).

2.3. Advertising Expenses Related to Children

Marketing campaigns that promote foods that are high in calories are numerous and significant. That said, an American consumers organization conducted a study about the money invested by food industry companies, in comparison to the government. It found that "Industries spent 1178 times the amount attributed for the governmental campaign promoting a healthy diet. Over \$11 billion against \$9.5 million" (Laurendeau & Marquez, 2006).

As well, it has been observed that for each dollar invested by the World Health Organization (WHO), for the promotion of healthy eating, 500 dollars are spent in the agri-food industry to promote all types of products. For example, "60% of direct foreign investments in the agri-food industry in Eastern Europe are allocated to the production of sugar, candy and soft drinks, compared to 6% for fruits and vegetables" (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 8).

With our neighbours south of the border, the agri-food industry's marketing techniques are in third place for the most promoted products, after the automotive and department store industries: "Promotional expenses in the food industry reached \$26 billion in 2000, a 50% increase over 10 years. Globally, the agri-food industry's budget invested in promotion of its products was and estimated \$40 billion in 2006." (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 5). In the agri-food industry, 80% of the expenses were allocated to the promotion of well-known brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Nestlé: "Of the six most well-known brands among little ones, four are from the agri-food industry." (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 18-19). The Weight Coalition efficiently describes the scope of the marketing strategies used by the various agri-food giants. It shows that McDonald's spent \$1.7 billion in marketing in 2005, while Kraft spends \$80 to 90 million annually for marketing directed at children (in the media, but also on product packaging created especially for them) (Coalition québécoise sur la problématique du poids [Coalition Poids], 2007: 9). An American firm, Datamonitor, identifies food advertising aimed at children as the precursor of childhood obesity (Coalition Poids, 2007: 9).

The agri-food industry's marketing strategies mainly target children because they aim to increase brand awareness, a preference for the brand and finally, loyalty to the brand. Eating habits, which are forged as early as childhood, are for the most part still present in adulthood. Children are therefore targeted since they are consumers who may remain loyal to the brand in the long term (Coalition Poids, 2007: 9).

3. Children's Eating Habits

Unfortunately, children's eating habits generally do not meet the recommendations included in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. According to a study conducted by Shields, 59% of children and adolescents eat less than 5 portions of fruits and vegetables per day (2005).

In 2003, a large-scale study conducted in Nova Scotia by Veugelers and his colleagues, with 5th grade children, revealed the following, as regards the recommendations in *Canada's Food Guide*:

Table 2
Children and the recommendations from Canada's Food Guide

- 42.3% of the subjects did not follow the recommendations related to dairy products.
- 49.4% of the subjects did not follow the recommendations related to fruits and vegetables.
- 54.4% of the subjects did not follow the recommendations related to whole grain products.
- 73.7% of the subjects did not follow the recommendations related to meat and alternatives (APMCC, 2006: 8)

This study also showed that children's eating habits, as well as the quality of their diet, were a result of the education received from their parents. In other words, the quality of the child's diet is positively related to parents' own eating habits. Parents who feel they have a healthy diet often have children with a healthy diet as well (APMCC, 2006: 8).

According to the majority of studies about advertising and children, eating habits have greatly changed over the last twenty years. This change is due to families' changing pace of life and also to advertising's influence: "Several medical studies have therefore linked tv watching to obesity, not only due to the inactivity it involves, to the snacking it is often associated with, but also to its role as an incentive to consume sugar-sweetened foods and soft drinks." (Dagnaud, 2003: 50) Aware of this scourge, European divisions of eleven agri-food giantsⁱⁱ signed an agreement to stop targeting children under 12 with their advertisements (Strachan & Pavie-Latour, 2006: 14-16).

According to researchers of Université du Québec à Montréal, media content, and especially mass media content, are one of the factors that contribute to the adoption of behaviours and lifestyles related to health: "it appears that these contents act as health determinants, for example by influencing the obesity increase or nicotinism" (Lagacé & al., 2010: 324-325).

3.1. Obesity Rates and Eating Habits

Obesity has doubled over a period of twenty years overall in industrialized nations. This is why, in 2006, certain European countries, such as France, signed a charter to fight against the obesity scourge. For these countries, it is still time to take action in order to reverse this deplorable situation: "particular attention should be paid to vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents, whose inexperience or credulity should not be exploited through commercial activity" (Le Monde, 2010).

The *Union des consommateurs'* report presents statistics about young Quebecois. Those aged 6 to 16 do not consume the minimum quantities recommended by *Canada's Food Guide* and are also overweight: "Health Canada is especially concerned about the fact that obese children tend to become obese adults" (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 6)

In 2006, globally, an estimated 17.6 million children under 5 were overweight (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 8). In 2010, the WHO found that around the world, 43 million preschool children were overweight or obese (WHO, 2011). Nowadays, the number of obese or overweight adults is equal to the number of adults who do not have access to enough food. Around the world, over one billion adults are overweight or obese (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 8).

It is important to mention the major role soft drinks play when addressing the food marketing issue. Young people consume more and more products that are high in sugar and soft drinks reinforce this phenomenon because they contain a lot of sugar (Association pour la santé publique du Québec, 2003):

For example, the consumption of soft drinks, which has been associated with weight gain among young people and with an increased calorie intake in general, jumped by a meteoric increase of 58.5% between 1997 and 2002, among American adolescents. This type of beverage now makes up 50% of all beverages consumed by these young people. A prospective study, conducted over a two year period (between 1995 and 1997) with kids aged 12 on average, and published in the scientific journal *The Lancet*, revealed that these subjects risked becoming obese increased by 60% with each additional soft drink they consumed daily, when considering various factors such as anthropometrical, demographic, diet-related data and other information about their lifestyles. Conversely, a study also showed that a reduction in the consumption of soft drinks reduced the incidence of obesity among children (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 12-13).

ⁱⁱ The eleven agri-food giants who signed the agreement are: Burger King, Coca-Cola, Ferrero, Danone, General Mills, Kellogg's, Kraft, Mars, Unilever, Nestlé & PepsiCo (Strachan & Pavie-Latour, 2006: 14-16).

4. Advertising and Obesity around the World

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) conducted in 2004, the obesity rate among adults and children/adolescents has dramatically increased over the last few years:

The need for a multi-agent, integrative approach to obesity prevention is reinforced by the fact that the world has become pervasively shaped by market economies. In such a society, the power of corporations cannot be ignored. They have been correctly accused of being part of the problem in the rise of obesity. The evolution of business practices that have emphasized the development and promotion of high caloric food in the last three decades in particular has also been empirically related to increased energy intake and BMI at the individual level. (Moore & al., 2007: 72).

The WHO has estimated that 60% of all chronic diseases will appear in the least industrialized countries by 2020. According to the same report, cardiovascular diseases are much more frequent in India and China than in industrialized countries: “Countries such as India and Russia are starting to experience significant growth, and have been highlighted by many of the world’s largest food groups as important markets for the future. As a result, the developing world is likely to increase its share of the global food and drink market.” (International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, 2003: 3).

Moreover, 60% of foreign investments, which are injected in agri-food production, aim sugar-sweetened products, candy, and soft drinks. The WHO also claims that for each \$100 invested in the production of fruits and vegetables, more than \$1000 are invested in soft drinks and candy. (International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, 2003: 4):

Food advertising affects food choices and influences dietary habits. Food and beverage advertisements should not exploit children’s inexperience or credulity. Messages that encourage unhealthy dietary practices or physical inactivity should be discouraged, and positive healthy messages encouraged. Governments should work with consumer groups and with the industry (including the advertising sector) to develop appropriate approaches to deal with the marketing of food to children (Livingstone, 2005: 4).

5. The Persuasive Aspect of Advertising to Children

The persuasive dimension of advertising and marketing is not easily identifiable for a child. The younger he is, the blurrier this dimension is. An American medical institute has shown that a child under the age of 8 generally does not have the required cognitive abilities to denote this persuasive dimension of ads (Harris & al., 2009: 216). As for children under 4, they do not always know the difference between the program and an ad. They may think that the ad is part of the program they are watching.

Do children really recognize the change between their television show and an ad? This question is greatly addressed and answers vary. Livingstone proposes that a child aged 3 to 4 reacts to the change between the program and the ad, because of the different audiovisual characteristics of these two types of content rather than the understanding of the difference between those contents. As well, this researcher found that a child aged 2 to 72 months ‘obeys’ to the “centering” phenomenon, so they react

to the ad's prime attributes, such as colour or sound, in order to determine if they like the ad or not (2004: 17).

As previously mentioned, these prime attributes are widely used in advertising directed at children. Livingstone found that by the age of 8, most children are able to differentiate commercial messages and television programs: "Before then, they also find it more difficult than adults to distinguish reality from fiction: for example, when actors or humans are used it is assumed to be real, while fiction is limited to cartoons, puppets or other fictitious characters; the notion of an actor paid to pretend to be someone else can be difficult for them to grasp" (Livingstone, 2004: 18).

It is after the age of 8 that the child would be more capable of understanding the persuasive dimension of advertising and from 10 to 12 that they could even be critical about it: "beyond the age of eight, children have greater ability to respond to advertising in a more sophisticated way but research has determined that many children as old as 10-12 years of age will not use their critical evaluation skills to interpret ads unless prompted to do so." (Medical Offer of Health, 2008: 5).

Kapferer claims that children do not understand the persuasive aspect of advertising, which Option consommateurs confirms:

Since they are captive, they are a golden audience for advertisers. When it comes to advertising, they are particularly vulnerable because of the unequal power relationship between an advertiser, who has significant financial resources to create an ad, and the child, credulous and naïve. Various studies, often contested by professionals from the industry, show that children do not have the psychological maturity to really grasp the advertiser's persuasive and sales objectives. As for the little ones, they are not even able to distinguish the program's commercials from the program they are watching. Children therefore risk being wronged during the consumption process (2008: 10).

Also, since they do not understand advertising's persuasive dimension, children under 8 have great confidence in it. A study conducted among children of an elementary school shows that less than 50% of them were aware of the persuasive dimension of advertisements (Batada, 2008: 13).

6. Children's Influencing Power in the Family Environment

Family dynamics have changed over the last few years. Dagnaud highlights "how much the family model and, within it, the child's place, have evolved." (2003: 48). The overvaluing of children and the undermining of parental authority are signs of this change. Codes are getting blurry, which is also reflected in the advertising industry. Advertising is affected by the tangent that is the increase of the child's influencing power:

Parents therefore appear to be influenced twice: directly, through the advertising discourse, and indirectly through their offspring's role. A consensus is far from reached regarding advertising's influence on children's influencing behaviour, though most researchers come to the conclusion that there is an actual influence in cases where the ads are about products created for children. However, this influence does not seem to have this automatic characteristic it is often criticized for. This influence is sometimes difficult to assess: a jingle or a slogan a child sings or repeats all day long may help add the brand to their parents' evoked set, even if the parents have not even

been exposed to the ad itself. These are of course linked advertising and infantile influences but they are quite tricky to apprehend (Union nationale des associations familiale, 2006: 1).

During the eighties, ads were directed at adults. At the turn of the nineties, the target gradually became children. Noticing the shift in influencing power within the family model, advertisers had to adapt to try and influence the behaviours of the new target audience: "Cognitive, affective and also moral elements forged the structure of the rationale. They discuss the child and its place within society. It is noted that the two main characteristics that gravitate around this image of the child are parental absence and group mind." (Dagnaud, 2003: 51).

Also, as previously mentioned, it seems that children greatly influence family purchases – around \$15 billion annually (Régie du cinéma, 2009: 60). Industry Canada assessed the evolution of children's buying power over the last few years:

Children expenses using their pocket money have doubled each decade between 1960 and 1990, tripling during the nineties. In 1968, children aged four to twelve had an annual purchasing power equal to 2.2 billion in US dollars; this number jumped to 4.2 billion US dollars in 1984, and 17.1 billion US dollars in 1994. In 2002, this buying power surpassed the 40 billion US dollar mark and experts predict it will be higher than 51.8 billion US dollars by 2006. James McNeal, an expert of the issue of advertising directed at children, estimated in 1998 that if, to these numbers, we added those produced by the additional influence generated by children aged four to twelve on family expenses, the amount would reach, for the year 2000 only, the overwhelming amount of 650 billion US dollars, which represents about 15% of the total American family expenses for that year, i.e. 6.7 billion US dollars (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 27).

Children may not have as much economic power as adults, but they certainly have a voice when it comes to family purchases: "According to the IED, child recommendations (up to 10 years old) reach about 68% for dairy products, 65% for candy, 40% for the type of vacation and even 19% and 11% for the clothing chosen by the mother and father." (Guichard, 2000: 14). Generally speaking, 67% of children make requests when they visit the grocery store with their parents. They influence 43% of family purchases and the overall amount of purchases influenced by children is 15% (Minot, 2002: 15).

In North America, children have a strong consumption power. They spend 17 billion per year and influence 25 to 40% of all household purchases, estimated at 170 billion annually. Advertising that targets North American children reached 2 billion in 1996, i.e. more than 20 times the expenses made for the same purposes 10 years earlier (Reese, 1996). In addition to spending in shopping centres, children buy more and more online. Children also consume information online, play games, and download music, chat and conduct research (Industry Canada, 2002). In 2003, about 6.7 million Canadian households had at least one member who used the Web regularly from home (Statistique Canada, 2004).

Because of the wide range of commercial messages meticulously targeted to specific segments of the child audience, children seem to have become less dependent on their parents in learning about consumer values. It is possible that entertainment and advertising aimed at young children shortens the period during which parents are the primary socializing force in the lives of their children. Although today's children and adolescents have the spending power to utilize their consumer skills, they still often lack the maturity to think carefully about buying decisions. Media literacy research is needed to understand how children and adolescents can be taught to make

thoughtful consumer decisions, as well as how to protect them from commercial pressures to buy quickly and impulsively. (Livingstone, 2004: 9).

Joël Brée, professor, confirms that children are able to influence their parents regarding consumption. He speaks of the *immediacy* phenomenon, the fact that the child wishes to acquire the product immediately when he spots it:

By definition, the child's life is ruled by a logic of immediacy. For him, desire requires rapid satisfaction. Brands have understood this well: special transactions and other "product gifts" (remember the Bonus!) encourage impulse purchases. In this context, the relation to brand and to the world it conveys via advertising plays an important role. However, the process is different for "public" objects of consumption: beyond the child's impulse (individual decision), the desire must first be validated by the group he is a part of... or would like to be a part of! In this context, the sharing process is part of this decision. Think of those stickers, whose collection depends on the ability to trade, a factor of integration within the group and of identity development (Economica, 2000).

Certain statistics help explain children's influential role. "It has also been shown that young people have a very strong influence on the whole family's food choices, parents often choosing to abdicate with regard to healthy eating issues to surrender to the children's incessant demands." (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 5). Yet, according to the study conducted by Françoise Minot, three parameters, other than basic parameters such as age, should be considered when addressing the child's influencing power: the nature of the products, the buying act and the behavioral roles in relation, as well as the notion of influence (Minot, 2002: 54-55).

6.1. The Nature of the Products

A child's behaviour regarding a product depends on the nature of the product. Nathalie Guichard presents three categories of products, based on the child's implication – Category 1 representing a high level of implication and Category 3, representing a lower level of implication. Included in Category 1 are candy, cookies, cakes, cereal and dairy products. Category 2 includes sugar-sweetened beverages (such as juice and soft drinks), general foods (pasta, rice, etc.) and prepared foods available at the grocery store. Finally, Category 3 represents the lowest level of implication, so it includes products such as oils, butter or margarine, coffee and cocktails containing no alcohol (Guichard, 2000: 83).

This categorization of the level of implication during the choice of food products is a good illustration of the theory according to which the product, and whom it is created for, influences the child's level of implication during the influence and decision process. Indeed, Category 3 products are made only for adults or the whole family. A table prepared by Nathalie Guichard efficiently shows the influence of the child according to the product category (Guichard, 2000: 157)

Table 3
The child's influence according to the product category

Category 1	Child's Influence
Candy	89.9%
Cereal	82.8%
Dairy	82.3%

Category 2	
Beverages	71.1%
General Foods	27.5%
Prepared Foods	26.5%
Category 3	
Oil	14.5%
Coffee	10.5%

6.2. The Act of Buying and Related Behavioral Roles

The child is more and more involved in family decisions regarding consumption. To describe this parameter, five steps should be listed to describe it (Minot, 2002: 55):

- Awareness of the problem (recognizing a need, product idea);
- Information search (internal and external sources)
- Evaluating conceivable solutions to solve the problem;
- Decision and actual choice (at the time of the purchase), based or not on results from the previous step;
- Results (evaluation after purchase).

The Weight Coalition reported numbers at the international and Canadian levels regarding children's expenses in the various food sectors:

Table 4
Expenses of children aged 4to 12 , globally

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1989: \$6.1 billion • 1997: \$23.4 billion • 2002: \$30 billion 	(Coalition Poids)
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PHAC addresses the "Kidfluence" phenomenon in its 2007 report on marketing directed at children in Canada:

Industry has conducted a considerable amount of research to identify the best strategies to encourage children to influence household purchases, usually by product requests that take place both in-store and at home. Research shows that a child's first product request occurs at about 24 months, and that the most common first in-store request is for ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (47%), followed by snacks (30%), and toys (21%) (McNeal, 1999). The most well-known industry research on the subject is the 1998 study called "The Nag Factor". The report, and others like it, tells marketers how to build a strategy that will encourage child purchase requests, sometimes referred to as "pester power" (Morales, 2000). The press release from the report's author, Western Media International ("The Fine Art of Whining: Why Nagging is a Kid's Best Friend"), notes that parents who were most likely to give in to nagging were those with very young children, teens and divorced parents (Western Media International, as cited in Linn, 2004). It also found that nagging was responsible for 40% of trips to entertainment establishments, one of every three trips to a fast food restaurant, and three out of every ten home video sales. Parents who dealt with children's pleas best were those whose lives were the least stressed, had a higher household income and were least likely to have young children (Linn, 2004) (PHAC, 2007: 8).

Nagging therefore puts parents in a difficult position because the child insists on getting the product, and it often happens at the point of purchase. Parents respond positively to the request to avoid a public quarrel or insistence from the child.

7. Communication Strategies

The advertising produced by the agri-food industry could influence eating habits of young children (Hastings & al., 2003). The logic behind any ad is quite simple: it tries to "meet consumers' needs and create new ones" (Renaud, 2007: 153). In 2007, the Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour la santé (INPES) informed us that 47 % of French young people (aged eight to fourteen) said that the ads they watched made them want to eat or drink (Laperrière & al., 2010: 163).

In this section, we will look at the different communication strategies aimed at children, that is, in order of appearance, product placement, sponsorships, promotion, and fictitious characters.

7.1. Product Placement

Product placement is a subtle and frequently used advertising technique. It can be noticed in films or television programs. It ensures the product is presented in such a way that the viewer sees it, without always being completely aware of it, as he is captivated by the consumed media (television program, film, video games, etc.). According to the WHO, product placement is:

[...]Product placement is the use of any message, logo, object or prop that appears in a visual or graphic in exchange for payment. It is a technique that is widely used to market food and beverage products; food companies have apparently viewed the technique as a powerful marketing tool ever since sales of an American confectionery brand, Reese's Pieces, soared after they were featured in the film "ET" (WHO, 2007: 56-58).

Product placement may appear in films, video clips, television programs and video games. It may also have a visual form or be mentioned by the actor or character of the media used (World Health Organization, 2007: 56-58). "New research from the Hood Center for Children and Families at Dartmouth Medical School has highlighted the significant potential negative impact that food product placements in the movies could be having on children." (Australian Food News, 2010).

The Barreau du Quebec claims that the characters and the work become associated with the product. This would affect the work and its reputation prejudicially (2003: 227):

While some, especially from the advertising industry, freely qualify it as sponsorship, or even advertising placement, legal officers still hesitate in giving it an advertising status, with all the legal consequences that entails. Yet, considering the promotional objectives and the commercial potential of product placement, it is hard not to attribute it a certain advertising vocation, as subtle as it might be when it is presented to the public. Therefore, successful placement features the product as a natural and essential accessory for the character. Despite advertisers' denials,

researchers agree about the possibility that the public may not be aware of the commercial influence efforts (Barreau du Québec, 2003: 222).

A good example of product placement is one from Coca-Cola, as the company paid Fox Network \$20 million to incorporate their brand in the show *American Idol*. The program is not specifically directed at children, but it is one of the most popular programs among Canadian children aged 2 to 11 (Medical Offer of Health, 2008: 8). During the first 30 episodes of *American Idol*, product placement was used for 4,151 products (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, 2008).

7.2. Sponsorship

Sponsorship is used more and more by agri-food companies to promote their products. As an example, soccer teams that are sponsored by the food company Tim Horton. According to Dr. Corinna Hawkes, this technique has several “benefits”, such as the ability to reach a great number of people if the event is broadcast around the world for example, and it is less expensive than televised advertising. She also defines sponsorship as: “provision of funds and other resources to an event or activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity”. (WHO, 2007: 54-55).

However, despite the advantages offered by this technique, it is not the most widely used by marketers. The amount spent on sponsorships represents less than 10% of companies’ advertising budget. Even though it isn’t a priority in their advertising plan, the amount spent globally by companies made an incredible jump, from 200 million American dollars in 1984, to 24,790 million American dollars in 2000 : “Food companies sponsor a wide range of activities, including sporting events, television programs and musical events.” (WHO, 2007 : 54-55).

In 2008, McDonald’s launched a program called “McDonald’s Champion Kids” during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games that took place in Beijing. This program gave 6 to 14 year old kids the opportunity to take part in the Olympic Games in person. The program was still running for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games. Children have the chance to participate in the Games, as young reporters. Each child selected represents their country to assume this role. McDonald’s was also present during the Games to feed the athletes and other people present. They also subsidized the construction of playing areas in three British Columbia locations to allow children, including children with disabilities, to have fun in modern and safe playing areas. McDonald’s significantly sponsored the Olympic Games, as it has been the official sponsor of the Olympic Games since 1976 (McDonald’s News, 2007). This affiliation could blur codes for children. They know that this worldwide event brings together the world’s greatest athletes, but by seeing McDonald’s feeding these athletes, they may think McDonald’s offers healthy food which allows athletes to be in such great physical shape (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 22; PHAC, 2007: 6).

7.3. Promotion

Promotion is used to encourage people to buy directly at the point of sale. It therefore does not take place before people come on-site, it actually happens right before their eyes. Food companies use this technique frequently, whether through purchase gifts, instant discounts or contests. The WHO addresses the expansion of this marketing technique. In the US only, 223,700 million American dollars were invested into promotion in 2002, compared to 211,700 million American dollars for advertising (WHO, 2007: 63-64).

Purchase Gifts

Bonus items offered with products aim to encourage people to purchase the product. According to Joosens, purchase gifts mainly target children, since they are more receptive than adults. This encourages children to convince their parents to buy the product (1983: 53).

Promotional Toys

Restaurant chains use several different techniques to attract children's attention toward their products. A number of them provide a playing area to allow children to have fun while they eat:

McDonald's, Burger King and KFC all use a variety of marketing techniques to make their products appealing to young children. Most of this marketing promotes their children's menus, for instance the 'Happy Meal' for McDonald's and the 'Kids Meal' for Burger King and KFC. However, some of the marketing is more generic and promotes the company or the brand – for instance the clown 'Ronald McDonald' is linked to the brand McDonald's rather than a particular menu, and facilities such as play areas make the restaurants attractive to children but do not promote a particular menu. (Consumers International, 2009: 13).

Another marketing technique highly used is the promotion of toys that are offered along with the meals. A number of these toys are also collectable or represent cartoon characters that are highly popular among children. Several visits are therefore required to collect the whole series of toys: "Cartoons, collectable toys and games are still used to promote a meal that could be contributing 50% of a child's GDA for fat, sugar or salt." (Consumers International, 2009: 7).

Several examples of the use of these cartoon characters could be mentioned. This report also found that advertisements which various promotional items offered in restaurants help children recognize the product once on-site, so they will ask their parents to get that product: "In 2006, 1.2 billion toys were sold with children's meals for fast food chains." (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, 2008).

7.4. Fictitious Characters

The use of fictitious characters in ads is no coincidence. A study conducted by Batada mentions that 94% of children are able to recognize Frosted Flakes cereal's Tony the Tiger character (2008: 2). Using a branded character multiplies by three the attention the child will pay to the message (Batada & Borzekowski, 2008: 20).

According to Laperrière (2009)'s study, the character allows the identification of the brand and the product. It increases brand awareness and therefore creates the desire to adopt the brand more quickly. The character also conveys the product's various characteristics and represents these characteristics. The character enhances the brand by using the colours and logos displayed. Brand learning is much easier this way.

Combining a brand with a character allows companies to reach children more successfully, allowing them to recognize the brand and ultimately adopt the brand. According to Laperrière, there are several types of branded characters: the product-character, the character-product, the product line-character, the signal-character, the sign-character, the baby-character and the licensed-character (2009: 103).

Kapferer studied the impact of fictitious characters on children. Considering the fact that these characters are fictitious, they would evacuate advertising's commercial dimension. Indeed, children think

that these characters, because they aren't real, cannot be paid for an ad. So, they don't believe the character is speaking of the brand for his own interest, but because it truly appreciates it. In the US however, it is prohibited to use characters from a cartoon or a film in a televised ad, since small children have difficulty distinguishing the advertising element from the program playing (1985: 55).

A number of product brands have created their own fictitious character to personify their brand. Let us mention McDonald's for example. Considering that the characteristics of several products are similar, the fictitious character helps reinforce the fact that these features are more present in its product: "The ultimate objective is to act on the creation of an affective relationship between the brand and the child. [...] And it is easier to have a relationship with a human being than with an object" (Kapferer, 1985: 59). The advertising character works in two ways: it creates feelings of affection and sympathy; it develops a relationship, and also becomes the symbol of the product's quality and of the satisfaction that it may provide.

Spokespeople for these products are often chosen to enhance the product's popularity. Children may associate the product represented by the spokesperson with that spokesperson, as they do with fictitious characters. They therefore think they can become their idol by using the same products. They assume the spokesperson necessarily uses the product they are associated with (Livingstone, 2004: 20).

Using celebrities in advertising strategies may confuse children *célébrités*. For young children, celebrities may be perceived as experts. Livingstone (2004) highlights the fact that using cartoons or cartoon characters may be perceived as such since they are often young children's heroes. As for older children and adolescents, experts have observed that the effects are not automatically related to advertising messages or to products. For example, young adolescent girls may experience low self-esteem or have a negative image of their own body after seeing celebrities in ads. Livingstone insists on the fact that celebrities should not be used to promote products that are high in fat, salt, and sugar (2004: 20).

8. Strategies Related to the Various Media

A few years ago, the *European Journal of Marketing* published a study which showed that young audiences did not have the ability to identify the commercial objective and the media strategy behind advertising (Lawlor, 2008:1204):

Young (1990) has suggested that children's understanding of advertising is contingent on their realisation that there is a source deliberately creating television advertisements, and they must also be aware that this source seeks to persuade its audience to purchase. The merit of exploring children's understanding of advertising intent lies in the contention that if children cannot discern that advertising has a commercial merit, then advertising which targets such children may be unethical, on the basis that it exploits their credulity and innocence." (Lawlor, 2008: 1204).

So, let's look at the various media that present advertising directed at children and try to understand in what way and how often they feature advertising.

8.1. Television

Television stations obtain approximately 25% of their advertising revenue from agri-food companies (or from the food industry): “Industries recognize that advertising is directly linked to their sales. » (Lagacé et al., 2006: 61). Consumers have a preference for products associated with junk food. Companies therefore leverage this preference to reach their top line; that is what they call the “Law of Supply and Demand” (Lagacé & al., 2006: 60).

This strategy allows them to reach the captive audience they are targeting, where it is the most present. To that effect, during Saturday morning cartoons, children see an average of one food ad every five minutes (Anderson, 2010). Within the last decade, parent groups, consumer organizations, researchers, regulatory agencies, and marketers have expressed concern about the persuasive power television has on children.¹ Estimates of the number of commercials viewed by young children range between 19,000 and 22,000 commercials per year or about three hours of television advertising every week of the year (Lambo, 1981: 1).

Televised advertising has long been chosen for its ability to convey emotion using both image and sound. And, these last few years, we have seen the development of several new techniques and media for advertising:

Televised advertising is a good medium to raise awareness about a new product, because it reaches people very quickly and it conveys ambiance and emotion quite successfully. Yet, it does have its limits. More and more, we are seeing that televised advertising by itself is not sufficient to motivate the consumer; the cause may be found in its evanescent nature and in its rather limited length: 20 to 30 seconds. To ensure an efficient strategy, marketing must approach the consumer not only through television, but with other media as well (Joosens, 1983: 26).

However, the television medium remains the most used to broadcast advertising. Of all the advertisements from agri-food companies, 75% are for television (Batada, 2008: 19). According to Dagnaud, for children, television is generally the main contact with advertising activities (Laperrière, 2009: 21). As we have previously mentioned, children are a good audience with which to establish customer loyalty and consumption is the first area where they express their desire for independence (Kapferer, 1985: 115).

The agri-food market mainly uses television to reach children, and with good reason:

Television is widely predominant in children’s responses as regards advertising sources. It is linked to over two thirds of desires and 63.2% of requests generated by advertising in the major media. Television’s impact, through advertising, on the development of a child’s desires, is confirmed. These results corroborate with Ludwig’s conclusions, stating that when advertising was a source of knowledge for children, it was televised advertising exclusively (Guichard, 2000: 234).

According to a report released in 2008 by Option Consommateurs, 90% of children say that television is the focus of their interests (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 9): “[...] In the US, 17% of babies under one year old and 48% of babies aged one to two are exposed to the device at least one hour per day. And actually, preschool children (six and under) spend as much time in front of the screens as they do playing outside” (Union des Consommateurs, 2006: 14).

The Importance of Television for Children

In terms of daily activities, television is in third place for children, after sleeping and going to school (Minot, 2002: 15). At the commemoration ceremony of the 20th anniversary of the *Convention internationale des Droits de l'enfant*, Jacques Brodeur presented a study that showed the importance of television in children's lives: "To get an idea of the power of media's influence among young people, Fondation Kaiser evaluated the place of the media in their lives: 58% eat in front of the screen, 42% have the tv on from morning to night, 53% have a tv in their bedroom, 49% don't have rules to follow regarding content and the amount of time they spend watching it, 81% cannot count on any parental supervision." (Presse gauche, 2009).

In Canada, Children aged 2 to 11 watch an average of 14.6 hours of television per week (Lebel & al., 2005: 3). This number is higher in Quebec (francophones), i.e. 15.1 hours of weekly consumption. "Close to 20% of the time these children spend in front of the TV is spent watching commercials; it appears that on average a young viewer would see 30,000 per year." Since children represent a global market of \$600 billion per year, it is no surprise that they are so targeted by commercials (Lebel & al., 2005: 3). According to a study conducted in October 2007 for the Ministry of Health, 47% say that the advertising seen on television encourages them to eat and drink, 62% of them request what they saw to their parents... and 91% say they get what they want because of their parents' weakness." (Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-Violente, n.d.: 1).

Kids' Time Slots

Young people watch television around the time they wake up (7-8 am), at lunch time (11am-12pm) and finally after school (4-8pm). "First of all, it seems that based on these statements, that children watch a lot of television, since aside from the late evening time slot, 24.3% to 63.9% of them are in front of their tv set during the day. The most solicited time slots are included in the 4:30pm – 8:30pm period: i.e. from the end of the school day to and including dinner time" (Guichard, 2000: 162).

While younger children are likely to be watching television in the morning, after school and on weekends, it is important to be aware that older children are watching prime time hours and to include these hours when doing research on developing policy intended to affect this age group of children (Potvin-Kent & al., 2010: 7).

A commercial that aims adults will therefore try to be broadcast during prime time. For those that target children, the ads will be broadcast according to their own time slots.

The Types of Products Advertised

Regarding food advertising, non-diet products are highly advertised to children, whereas products related to diet are more often advertised to adults (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 16). The non-diet products advertised are those of fast food chains, soft drinks, snacks, candy, and cereals that are high in sugar: "A study that was conducted in parallel in France and Quebec at the beginning of the nineties (Watiez & Dubois, 1997) shows that televised ads about food broadcast during young people's prime time mostly concern sugar-sweetened products and beverages. The broadcasting of these advertisements follows young viewers' television watching curve." (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 16).

A study mentioned by the Union des consommateurs report shows that most food ads featured on television promote products of low nutritional quality:

Out of a total of 135 food products these ads were portraying, 73% (i.e. 99 products out of 135) are not part of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. It displays all types of snacks, candy, prepared foods and various beverages. Researchers did a similar exercise in English Canada by focusing on the commercials broadcast on Saturday mornings, from 7 to 11am on five television stations. Out of 160 hours of programming, 147 commercials were reviewed, among which half (74 out of 147) advertised food. Among the ads created to promote foods, about fifty represented foods of low nutritional quality, fast food restaurants or sugar-sweetened cereal (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 16).

It seems the time spent watching television has a very significant influence on children as young as three years old, by driving them to ask their parents to get them to buy those marketed products:

For example, a cohort study of over 10,000 9 to 14 year olds in the USA found that those who spent more time with television/videos/games showed larger BMI increases a year later. These effects were stronger for those who are already overweight, suggesting a cumulative effect over time (Berkey, Rockett, Gillman & Colditz, 2003). The British Birth Cohort Study, similarly, followed up over 11,000 children from the ages of five to thirty, revealing that the amount of weekend television viewing in early childhood continues to influence BMI in adulthood (Livingstone, 2006: 5).

Televised Advertising Strategies

Advertisers want to get noticed and to do so among children, they use elements this audience appreciates:

Certain elements are therefore particularly appreciated: humour, advertisements in the form of cartoons, a pretty song, easy to recognize jingles, the presence of animals or their favorite heroes. Other may lead to rejecting the ad: taking advantage of children's assumed naivety by using demonstrations that are too spectacular to be real, an overly slow rhythm, abstraction, using references that are unknown to them, or by using fear (Union nationale des associations familiales, 2006: 1).

According to Monique Dagnaud, advertising is a mirage that represents the possibility of self-realization through consumption (Dagnaud, 2003: 51). It aims to suggest and demonstrate that consumption allows personal fulfilment. According to Kapferer, three advertising strategies are generally used to draw the child's attention toward the message. The product featured, the commercial's creativity and repetition increase the child's attention on the message (Kapferer, 1985: 17):

Other advertising strategies ensure a quick understanding of the message (signal criteria) and are specific to the product sold. Two thirds (64.0%) of the 75 concepts indexed obviously use the brand or product colours. Furthermore, nearly one out of ten concepts (9.3%) uses one dominant colour (easily identifiable). As well, advertising concepts insist on presenting their product, showing both the product and the packaging in 69.3% of cases. Finally, the name of the product of the brand is repeated several times during the commercials. In close to a third of the concepts (22 out of 75), there is no difference, but in the remaining two thirds, the focus is mainly on the product (Laperrière & al., 2010: 168).

- According to Kapferer, selective attention is the phenomenon that would cause the child to notice an ad or not. Children are more likely to notice a commercial that features a product that is part of their

“field of interests at the time”. Françoise Minot’s study tends to support this idea. According to her, children aged 5 to 8 tend to appreciate a commercial when they appreciate the product presented. If the child doesn’t like the product he sees, he generally won’t like the message associated with it (Minot, 2002: 51).

- The message’s creativity, i.e. the quality of its creation, is a major factor in getting the child’s attention. Dagnaud refers to the dynamic aspect of advertising when it comes to the food industry:

From then on, advertising acquires a much more dynamic nature, opening up to a wider range of feelings and arguments. Frosties will try to give its cereal a magical dimension and old tactic in advertising to children. [...] For Kiri, the advertising message is built around the glorification of the nature in which the child gourmet/influencer is frolicking. The naturalistic trilogy is composed of three catch phrases: “gourmets love life,” “gourmets are knowledgeable” and “gourmets know what they want” (Dagnaud, 2003: 51).

- Finally, repetition helps increase the chances that the child will see the message. The higher the repetition, the better the chances of seeing it. Françoise Minot’s study brings another interesting fact to the repetition factor and helps to see this strategy’s efficiency in a new light. Indeed, the repetition of the message is important for the familiarization of the child with the message and also for its retention (Minot, 2002 : 50): “It should be added that the more frequently an advertising message is seen, the more the child tends to develop an affective connection, a form of familiarity with it (Kapferer, 1985; Montigneaux, 2002). It is therefore natural to think that these messages are reaching their target.” (Laperrière & al., 2010: 168).

The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that children should not watch television for several consecutive hours. For children under 2, the Academy recommends that they do not watch television at all. For older children, a maximum of one to two hours of television per day is recommended (Wootan, 2003: 9).

Unfortunately, the products presented by food commercials are the opposite of what is recommended by Canada’s Food Guide. “Snacking at nonmeal times appears in 58% of food ads during children’s programming, and only 11% of food ads are set in a kitchen, dining room, or restaurant. In addition to good taste, the most common product benefits communicated include fun, happiness, and being “cool.” Child marketing makes clear that the product is exciting, fun, and cool.” (Harris & al., 2009: 213).

According to the following table, it appears that television influences food preferences, as well as children’s adiposity:

Table 5
Overweight children and television

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Televised advertising influences preferences in terms of food and beverages, as well as the purchase requests made by 2 to 11 year olds. • Televised advertising of foods and beverages drives children to prefer and ask for products that are high in calories, yet low in nutritional value. • Televised advertising influences short term consumption for children aged 2 to 11. • Exposure to televised advertising is associated with adiposity among children aged 2 to 11
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(APMCC, 2006: 14)

Canada is in third position globally in terms of the number of ads broadcast per hour. Seven food commercials, per channel, are presented every hour. Canadian television for children is also in third place for presenting the most food commercials, i.e. 82% of all advertisements are from the agri-food industry (OPHA, 2010: 1). Food advertising on television is therefore more likely to have an impact on children, since they will spend more time watching it until the end of their high school studies than in class (APMCC, 2006: 17).

Television and Overweight /Obesity

Does advertising contribute to increasing obesity? According to most studies on advertising and children, eating habits have changed a lot over the last twenty years or so. This transformation is due in part to the changing pace of life families are experiencing, but also to advertising's influence. "Therefore, several medical studies have established a link between television watching and obesity, due not only to the inactivity associated with it, the snacking that often goes with it, but also to the incitement to consume sugar-sweetened foods and soft drinks." (Dagnaud, 2003: 50).

Research has shown that exposure to televised advertising, at times where many commercials directed at children are broadcast, is associated with lower results as regard to nutritional knowledge and the understanding of food phraseology (i.e. syntagms and expressions included in messages that mainly target children, for example "part of this complete breakfast" or "vitamin enriched") (Wiman & Newman, 1989 in APMCC, 2006: 12).

Aware of this scourge, the European divisions of eleven agri-food giants have signed an agreement to no longer target children under 12 in their advertising (Strachan & Pavie-Latour, 2006: 14-16).

Specialty Channels

To differentiate commercials directed at adults from those created for children, we can also consider the channel selected. Indeed, advertisers who target young people in particular tend to advertise on youth channels:

In Quebec, currently, children aged two to eleven spend several hours per week (between 14 and 25 hours) in front of the television, the ultimate medium for advertising (Publicité-Club de Montréal, 2009; Marquis, Filion & Dagenais, 2005). This viewing time is shared by general-interest channels and specialized channels, including several that target young people specifically. Over the last few years, specialty channels are gaining more and more ground among television viewers and are now ahead of general-interest channels for the March-August period (Publicité-Club de Montréal, 2009; Laperrière, 2010: 164).

In 1992, the French *Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel* declared that the advertising included in youth programming is mainly higher than in other types of programs. (Minot, 2002: 16):

First of all, we have noted that youth channels use more strategies than general-interest channels to encourage children's interaction with commercials (affective dimension criteria), such as animation and branded characters. Also, the messages broadcast on youth channels use children twice as often as actors (or their voice) than general-interest channels and, moreover, little boys are usually featured. Children are shown alone a third of the time, i.e. there are no parental figures in the ads. When there are, mothers are most often that parental figure. As for general-interest channels, they prefer to use celebrities whose success is based on fame. To summarize, we have observed that on three quarters of the messages on youth channels, a child

or an animated element (character, celebrity) are used, while on general-interest channels, they are present in a little less than half of the messages (Laperrière & al., 2010: 166).

General-interest television remains a format of choice for the adult audience, while specialty television reaches an audience that is more homogeneous. Children's channels are undoubtedly the best way to reach them, since the channel's content is designed especially for them. "To that effect, marketing techniques used as part of certain advertising campaigns apparently promote products known for being popular among kids, at times that are convenient for them, and they would use strategies, such as animated characters, fun music or pleasant themes to reach them." (Laperrière & al., 2010: 163).

8.2. Internet

In fact, a study found that over two thirds of websites developed for children obtain a major part of their revenue through commercial advertising. The agri-food industry uses a wide range of marketing strategies online, from electronic video games to various promotions, as well as kids clubs, screensavers and partnerships with renowned companies (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 25).

New technology is used daily by young people and advertisers are aware of that: "For households with children under 18, the Web's utilization ratio increased from 41% in 1999 to 73% in 2003." (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 24). The Internet has therefore become a way to promote products offered by agri-food companies. As well, the fact that advertisers can access children's personal information is interesting to them. Indeed, this access allows them to pinpoint children's tastes and preferences.

Banner advertising, on the Web, appeared in 1994, when this technology was making its first steps (WHO, 2007: 59): "According to the Canadian-based Media Awareness Network, young people are the ideal target for Internet advertisers because they stay online for longer periods than adults and they participate in a wider range of online activities." It is more difficult to protect children against the Internet considering the scale of this medium and the fact that a child can access content from around the world in one click:

Laws, self-regulations and voluntary codes specific to Internet marketing to children were identified in 13 of the 73 countries surveyed. In most cases, regulation is in the form of general guidelines (see Table 12). None of the Internet marketing regulations identified mentions food specifically, but the general guidelines implicitly limit the ability of food companies to market to children and obtain information from them (WHO, 2007: 59).

The Internet has become a strong secondary source of ad exposure for children. By February 2008, Internet ad revenues (for all ages) are expected to exceed radio ad spending for the first time in Canada, reaching a projected \$1.7 billion by the end of the year. A recent study found that 85% of the food brands most heavily promoted to children had a website that either directly targets children, or contained content that would likely be of interest to them. Some sites offered games, promotions, membership opportunities, movie and TV tie-ins, and most used viral marketing strategies such as encouraging visitors to email friends to invite them to visit the site or join an online club (Medical Offer of Health, 2008: 8).

Web advertisements are more difficult to avoid, considering they have various forms, including the games children play. This is why this type of marketing concerns observers with regard to the lack of regulations to protect children against these strategies that are rapidly expanding (PHAC, 2007: 6).

8.3. School

Advertisements in school are more and more popular because they can reach the target audience, children, directly, in one single location: “According to Claude Cossette, Founder of Groupe Cossette, the largest marketing agency in Canada, the moral is contextual. For schools that need more and more funds, advertising money is tempting. The amount of advertising and marketing directed at children will continue to grow rapidly” (Laurendeau & Marquez, 2006). Since marketing to children in schools is within an educational institution, researchers claim it could blur children’s vision of healthy and unhealthy food products by giving the impression that the products are good because they are advertised in the institution: “since most children and adolescents are at school every day of the week and are therefore a captive audience, the exposure to advertising in the school environment is maximal and repetitive, which presents a definite advantage, especially in a context where competition for this advertising may be limited.” (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 22).

The *Union des consommateurs* presented the various techniques used to promote food in schools and in school environments (2006: 22):

- *direct advertising* (on school bulletin boards, buses, year books, school newspapers, computers, student radio; corporate logos on the gym scoreboard and/or on sports equipment and/or on school supplies, free food samples, etc.);
- *indirect advertising* (identified product package used to teach the guidelines of Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating, various contest posters or special campaigns;
- *product sale* (contracts – often exclusive– with soft drink companies, vending machines, food selling contracts for cafeterias and on campus, fund-raising campaigns through the sale of food products, etc.);
- *market research* (student surveys, taste tests, online surveys, detection of students’ online behaviours).

We are now seeing the appearance of a combination of two advertising techniques to reach children in school environments. Among these techniques, one technique is more uncommon within the school context. This technique is television. According to a report about junk food marketing, conducted by the Union des consommateurs, a specialty tv channel (private) has established a presence in 12,000 American schools since 1989. This channel, *Channel One*, broadcasts 10 minutes of information, with an additional 2 minutes of commercials. The advertising featured on *Channel One* presents foods that are not part of a healthy and balanced diet, and it is viewed, daily, by 8 million young Americans attending the sixth grade or older. For comparison, the *Union des consommateurs* shows that this number is equal to the number of television viewers recorded during the SuperBowl (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 22).

Another mix of technologies we are seeing, in these institutions, is Web advertising. Since the Web is now available in almost every school, children have access to the content and ads this technology features. Since March 30th, 1999, Canada became the first country to connect all its schools and public libraries to the Internet:

In fact, a study found that over two thirds of websites developed for children obtain a major part of their revenue through commercial advertising. The agri-food industry uses a wide range of marketing strategies online, from electronic video games to various promotions, as well as kids clubs, screensavers and partnerships with renowned companies. (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 25).

In Quebec, advertising in schools is supposed to be prohibited by law. As for Canada, Advertising Standards Canada has implemented standards to fight against this growingly present phenomenon: "Participating companies commit to respecting the standards established by schools on an individual basis, and by school boards in general. As well, they commit to not advertising food products or beverages in elementary schools" (2009: 37-38).

PHAC mentions, in its report on marketing directed at children in Canada, that advertisers recognize how advertising in schools is both profitable and successful. Coca-Cola's CEO has actually mentioned that "the school system is where you build brand loyalty" (PHAC, 2007: 6). The same report shows that marketing in schools has different forms, such as partnerships or sponsorships, intensive programs, sponsored educational material or certain company logos posted on cafeteria walls (PHAC, 2007: 6). Without forgetting the relatively new phenomenon of classrooms named after major brands: "A national survey found that 28% of Canadian elementary schools reported the presence of some form of advertising in the school and 19% had an exclusive marketing arrangement with Coke or Pepsi." (PHAC, 2007: 6).

Marketing in schools is also a concern for the WHO. In their November 2009 report, one of their recommendations was to ban this type of marketing. The WHO claims that school is an environment where young people are captive and it assumes the role of promoter of a healthy diet, which could confuse kids regarding good and bad eating habits:

Schools, child-care and other educational establishments are privileged institutions acting *in loco parents*, and nothing that occurs in them should prejudice a child's well-being. Therefore the nutritional well-being of children within schools should be paramount and the foundation stone for children's well being this formative age. (WHO, 2009: 12).

An example, highlighted by the PHAC, regards the physical program "Go Active! Fitness Challenge," run by certain elementary schools, and sponsored by McDonald's. Children are analysed through six different physical exercises over the fall season, and they perform the six exercises a second time during winter, to assess their progress. The schools, which send out their results, have the chance to win \$500 in physical activity equipment if the children's results show real progress. Posters for the promotion of the program feature the McDonald's logo and the company's fictitious character, Ronald McDonald, visits the schools to promote healthy eating habits. The promotion of this cause appears contradictory when you look at the products offered by the company involved. In New-Brunswick, the Minister of Education banned Ronald McDonald from elementary schools after seeing the advertising for the promotion of the program (PHAC, 2007: 6).

8.4. Grocery Stores

Because children have a high influencing power on their parents when purchases are made, food companies ensure children will recognize their products once they are at the point of sale: "In-store marketing programs that appeal to youth appear to be extremely effective: 34% of parents with children

under 12 years old and 60% of parents with teenagers report that they spend more in the supermarket when shopping with their children than when shopping alone” (Harris & al., 2009: 3).

Grocery carts for clients in training, i.e. children, are another significant element of the sales strategy used by certain businesses. Indeed, these help kids feel independent and, as previously discussed, consumption is the first area where the child expresses a need for autonomy and independence (Kapferer, 1985: 115). That cart therefore subtly fulfils this need and allows them to “choose” products to put in their cart. Later, we will look at how children’s persuasive and decision-making power justify the use of the term “choose” products: “In 75% of the cases, the child’s first request for a product, sometimes as early as at the age of 2, takes place at the supermarket and the most desired items would be breakfast cereal (47%) and beverages and snacks (30%), up to three out of four products requested by kids to their parents are those featured in television commercials.” (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 17).

Product promotion and packaging reinforce impulsive behaviours at the store (Harris & al., 2009: 215). It therefore creates a short term, and not a long term purchasing behaviour. “And how does promotion work? It temporarily modifies the consumer’s purchasing behaviours by allowing the “selling” store to take part of the customer base that usually belongs to competitors.” (Cossette & Déry, 1987: 41).

Packaging

Packaging is the physical aspect through which the child may recognize the product, at the point of sale, after seeing it in some type of ad. It may even have an impact on the child’s food preferences. Therefore, the child will choose the food product with packaging from a brand he likes and will prefer it even if the product inside the packaging has been changed and is not the one associated with the brand (Laperrière, 2009: 77). Following a discovery by Borzekowski and collaborators, the Weight Coalition mentions that young children aged 3 to 5 will prefer french fries offered in a McDonald’s packaging, over the same french fries in different packaging (2007: 794). A study from Yale University presents statistics about product packaging and the cross promotion it generates:

The number of products with youth-oriented cross-promotions increased by 78% during the period examined. Overall, 71% of cross-promotions involved third-party licensed characters and 57% appealed primarily to children under 12 years of age; however, the use of other forms of promotions increased from 5% of the total in 2006 to 53% in 2008, and promotions targeting pre-school and general audiences increased from 23% to 54% of the total. Only 18% of products met accepted nutrition standards for foods sold to youth, and nutritional quality declined during the period examined (Consumers International, 2009: 13).

The same study shows that 50% of parents believe that the cartoon characters found on packaging have a major impact on their kids’ eating habits. This study also claims that 46% of these parents feel that the impact of additional offers, such as toys or trips, is as high as that of fictitious characters on their young ones’ eating habits (Harris & al., 2009: 3).

9. Marketing Techniques

To bypass Quebec regulations, marketing specialists use other media or marketing techniques, for example, advertising billboards, which are not governed by Quebec laws, as well as packaging and collectable products: “According to a study from Yale’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, cross-promotions on food packaging aimed at children nearly doubled between 2006 and 2008 in the US” (Australian Food News, 2010). A study conducted in 2006 by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) shows that food companies spend \$195 million to reach children and adolescents at points of sale. In grocery stores, for example, 12% of the marketing budget is used to target children. This type of “promotion” comes in second place among advertising tactics used, after television (Harris & al., 2009: 1).

These techniques are used to bypass regulations, but also to catch children’s eye and attract their attention directly because they are more receptive. Among these techniques, let us mention advertising broadcast through mobile phones, websites, sports equipment, sponsorships, email, text messages, etc. (WHO, 2009: 10-11).

In 2006, in the US, the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB) launched Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative. This self-regulated initiative aims to stop the marketing-mix that targets children under 12, and to promote a healthier diet. This initiative also aims to reduce the use of third parties, such as fictitious characters, to reach children and draw their attention:

Researchers at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity assessed 397 products that used crosspromotions - including use of “third-party licensed characters, as well as tie-ins with other television shows and movies, athletes, sports teams and events, theme parks, toys and games, and charities”. They found that over the three year period (2006 - 2008) the number of products using youth-oriented cross-promotions increased by 78% (Australian Food News, 2010).

9.1. Children Aged 3 to 7

Marketing techniques also vary based on the child’s age. In terms of cognitive development, children aged 3 to 7 do not identify things in the same way as older children. Companies therefore use different techniques that will have a greater impact among this group and will be more successful at getting their attention. That is where graphs, colours and various shapes come into play. These techniques are identifiable through the product’s packaging or the fictitious characters representing the product. They catch the eye and allow kids to develop a visual memory of the product, and later ask their parents when shopping with them (Food Standards Agency, 2003: 36-37).

9.2. Fun Food

As we have shown, the role of advertising is to make a product attractive, so the young consumer will want to buy it. When it comes to food and children, this appeal factor for the product is found in the fun it provides when consumed. “Fun Food” has therefore entered the market to conquer children. Examples of this type of products would be: Fruit RollUps, Ficello or string cheese, cheese with fun

shaples, nuggets in the shape of animals, etc. This type of food is qualified by Marion Nestle as toy food (Nestle, 2006).

This Fun Food appears in various entertaining forms, for example: tube yogurt, soups and pasta in the shape of characters, candy straws, etc.:

For Marion Nestle, Ph. D., Fun Food specialist and Nutrition Professor at New York University, children should consume the same foods as their parents. She says that kids who eat food made “for adults” are also healthier. Indeed, many foods for children are often refined, high in sugar and fat. Their eating habits will only deteriorate as they get older, because these kids will not have received the appropriate information to make wise choices without their parents (Nestle, 2006).

An additional factor that comes into play as regards “Fun Food” is fashion trends related to the brands used. As early as 3, children judge other children based on the brands they choose:

Another result highlighted by this study: children judge each other according to the brands they consume, by the age of 3. "They consider other children to be popular or unpopular, boring or interesting depending on the brands they use. The authors of the study claim that at an early age, children already attribute a lot of importance to the use of brands to cultivate and promote their self-image". They add that for 3 to 5 year olds, "fast food is fun, exciting and tasty". Soft drink brands are often described as fun because the beverage 'sparkle' (Maxisciences, 2010: 1).

A study conducted among children of an elementary school, on behalf of the Food Standard Agency, shows that children’s food choices are influenced by their exposure to advertising: “A study of primary school children, for instance, found that exposure to advertising influenced which foods they claimed to like[...]. A number of studies have also shown that food advertising can influence what children eat. One, for example, showed that advertising influenced a primary class’s choice of daily snack at playtime ” (Food Standards Agency, 2003: 2).

Results of a study by Yale University have shown that food advertising that promotes fun directly contributes to the increase of food consumption (American Psychological Association, 2009: 410).

9.3. Effects of Commercial Advertising on Children

Table 6
Effects of commercial advertising on children

- Consumption attitude (children’s expenses, influence on parents’ purchases)
- Nagging phenomenon (children’s requests to parents, financial stress)
- Undermining of authority (the child portrayed as an autonomous consumer who knows all)
- Brand preferences
- Eating habits that are harmful to health

(Option Consommateurs, 2008, p. 24)

9.4. Marketing Techniques around the World

An international survey, the Association of Consumer Food Organizations report, led to a critical finding: food companies that target children from around the globe adapt to the various geographical areas to do so. In doing so, techniques and concerns with regard to food marketing directed at children remain mainly the same:

In India, a consumer group reported that food advertisements feature in early evening children's viewing times, and expressed concern about food sponsorship of sport events and education materials in schools, especially for fast food, confectionery and soft drinks. _ In Japan, a consumer group reported that children were also targeted through TV and sporting events, and identified advertising as one of the top negative influences on children's diets. (International Association of Consumer Food , 2003: 19).

9.5. From Push to Pull

Another strategy used by companies is to attract the consumer, as well as their attention, on marketing messages broadcast in social networks because they are highly used by young people. This way, they reinvent the "word of mouth" technique through new technology like social media:

For children, this can include online sites that encourage visitors to send an email to friends in the form of a branded invitation to visit the site. An analysis of online food advertising found that 64% of children's sites associated with 96 top food brands encouraged this strategy. The potential utility of the strategy for food and beverage promotion is just emerging, in particular for soft drinks (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007: 7-8).

10. Regulations and Jurisdictions

The many studies conducted regarding the issue of food advertising directed at children illustrate how this theme has become a worldwide concern. To that effect, certain countries have their own laws related to advertising aimed at children. In Quebec for example, advertising created for children under 13 is prohibited. Yet, the problem is that it is often difficult to monitor all the various forms of advertising. Even in television, commercials that appear on American channels and are broadcast in Quebec, may not be monitored. An article published in *Le Monde* discussed this issue and mentioned that the obesity rate is lower among young francophones than young anglophones. However, it also mentions that it does not indicate a direct correlation, but that the issue could be examined further to determine if an actual link is forming between these two facts (Le Monde, 2010):

The advertising ban in Quebec is, however, having an impact on the content of advertisements during French Quebec's children's preferred television viewing. Fun and the appearance of media characters or celebrities were used significantly less frequently as persuasive as appeal and there were significantly fewer food-beverage contests, and sponsorship announcements in the French Quebec viewing (and none related to food-beverages), which is a significant difference from the viewing of the two English groups (Potvin-Kent & al., 2010: 5).

Television remains the medium that is most targeted by regulations and laws, as it is children's focus of interest, aside from the appearance of computers and the Internet (Option Consommateurs, 2008; 9). A report by the WHO about food marketing to children mentions that television is the most regulated medium:

It is also the most widely regulated; 85% of the 73 countries surveyed had some form of regulation on television advertising to children and almost half (44%) had specific restrictions on the timing and content of television advertisements directed at children. Two countries and one province have banned television advertising to children. The effect of such bans on children's diets is, however, difficult to evaluate; existing bans tend to be undermined by cross-border advertising (i.e. advertising that originates from another country) and other marketing techniques, factors which complicate evaluation (WHO, 2007).

10.1. Canada

In Canada, except for the province of Quebec, advertising is regulated according to the Canadian Code of Advertising Standardsⁱⁱⁱ. This code was created in 1963 and has been regularly updated since then. It includes:

14 articles which set advertising's accessibility criteria for all form of media, including printed media, the Internet and outdoor advertising. The 14 provisions of this code address various issues related to responsible advertising practices, for example:

- Accuracy and Clarity;
- Disguised Advertising Techniques;
- Price Claims;
- Safety;
- Unacceptable Depictions and Portrayals;
- Advertising to Children.

(Option Consommateurs, 2008: 37)

In light of the scope of food advertising, Canada issued, in 2004, Guidelines regarding food advertising aimed at children. This addition was entitled "Advertising to Children". Let's look closely at clauses 12 and 13 which focus on food advertising directed at children:

Clause 12 provides that advertising messages must not present information or illustrations that might result in their physical, emotional or moral harm. It must not exploit their credulity, lack of experience or their sense of loyalty. Clause 13 (Advertising to Minors) provides that products prohibited from sale to minors must not be advertised in such a way as to appeal particularly to persons under legal age, and people featured in advertisements for such products must be, and clearly seen to be, adults (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 37).

In the 1970s, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission established its own code of ethics, the *Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children*, which ratifies the one that is already in effect in Canada. Canadian broadcasters are aware that they must comply with the requirements of this code and that it is a condition to the renewal of their license.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.adstandards.com/en/standards/canCodeOfAdStandards.pdf>

10.2. Quebec

With regard to advertising directed at children, Quebec is an example in the international arena. It is the first jurisdiction in North America to have established a law for the monitoring of this type of advertising. This law was created in 1980 after claims from the majority of the population and several associations. Sections 248 and 249 therefore aim to protect children against advertising. They provide that advertising to children less than 13 years of age, and for commercial purposes, is prohibited. To determine if an advertising message is really directed at a child under the age of 13, one must take into account the context in which it is presented, and in particular of: the nature and intended purpose of the goods advertised, the manner of presenting such advertisement, as well as the time and place it is shown (See Annex A). According to the Weight Coalition, 90% of Quebecois believe that it is necessary to supervise advertising directed at children and 60% of Quebecers would like the enforcement of the law to be stricter (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 41). These legal measures are part of Quebec's *Consumer Protection Act* and they are enforced by the *Office de la protection du consommateur*. This law does not apply to products that are exclusively or mainly used by children aged 12 or younger. Specifically regarding food, soft drinks and other sugar-sweetened or salted snacks in particular, the standards do not apply since these products are not eaten exclusively, nor mainly by children under 12. This law applies to all forms of broadcasting and provides that only the ads, which do not at all appeal to children, may be presented during children's programming: "The Quebec advertising ban does not appear to be limiting French or English Quebec children in our study from seeing food promotion during their preferred viewing on television" (Potvin-Kent & al., 2010: 7).

10.3. International

Globally, international law provides an agreement aiming to protect children's rights. According to this agreement: "Member States recognize the importance of the role assumed by the media and ensure that children have access to information and content from various national and international sources, in particular those that aim to promote their social, spiritual, moral, as well as physical and mental well-being" (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 65).

Various countries have adopted regulations, standards, agreements, etc., aiming to protect children against advertising. However, only two countries have made decisions similar to the choices made by Quebec. Sweden decided, in 1991, to abolish all forms of advertising to children by taking into account that this target audience is composed of vulnerable individuals. Advertising is therefore prohibited if it targets children aged 12 or younger. This country feels that it is morally unacceptable to use a medium that is as powerful as television to target this audience. Mailed advertising aimed at children under 16 is also prohibited in Sweden. As for Norway, a law was also issued, but it does not provide the prohibition of advertising aimed at children like in the case of Sweden, nor does it regulate it in the same way Quebec does. In Norway, the focus is placed on the fact that advertising should allow the audience to clearly distinguish fiction from reality. As well, advertisers may not broadcast an ad featuring a child before 9pm. This country provides a special statement regarding the very strict application of this law and the indisputable use of the term "inaccurate" in its article (Option Consommateurs, 2008: 65-69)

See Appendix A for a summary of advertising regulations in various countries.

11. Healthy Food Products

The majority of food products that are featured in the various forms of advertising are high in calories and are not included in a balanced diet. To that effect, 89% of all food products featured in advertisements are not elements of a balanced diet (UFC, 2006: 2). It is difficult to promote healthy food products in a highly competitive industry. Major food companies have greater financial means to promote their products that are high in sodium and fat. For each American dollar invested by the WHO for the promotion of healthy eating habits, the agri-food industry spends \$500 to promote its processed products (International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, 2003):

The West Virginia University and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) conducted a study in order to evaluate if a media campaign in conjunction with a public relations strategy could generate changes in the population's eating behaviours. Ads presented on the radio and television, supported by press conferences and other events covered by the media, drove people to reduce their consumption of 2% mg milk, and choose 1% mg milk instead. Results of phone surveys following the media campaign showed that 34% of people had made the change in the city targeted by the campaign, compared to 4% for the same period in a control city where no campaign had taken place (Union des consommateurs, 2006: 17-18).

Table 7
SOM survey for the Weight Coalition in 2007

- 90% of the surveyed Quebecers (1000) believe it is necessary to supervise advertising directed at children
- 60% would like to see a stricter enforcement of the law related to advertising directed at children under 13 (7% in favour of more lenient enforcement)
- 74% of adult Quebecers feel that children are currently very often (25%) or often (49%) exposed to advertising that is specifically directed at them (even though it is officially prohibited by law)

12. Educating Children about Advertising

A child's education is often filled with contradiction. On the one hand, family and school educate the child as regards the nutritional value of foods when it is time to eat. On the other hand, advertising tries to ensure the child will recognize its product. Advertising sometimes drives the child to depart from what he or she has learned from family and the school environment when it is time to choose a product. The mother's opinion is no longer the primary criteria, while advertising encourages him to focus on the "fun" criteria when choosing a product. Parents also say that their children's requests for consumption products are high, and that these requests are due mainly to televised advertising (Minot, 2002: 59). He then ends up making a choice based on the product presented in commercials because: "the child thinks according to the last impression experienced" (Kapferer, 1985: 142). Most studies conducted about food advertising and its influence on children mentions that kids are bombarded by ads of unhealthy products and that these ads contribute to increasing childhood obesity rates.

12.1. Educational Games

In Canada, an online educational game can help educate children about marketing. As we've seen, marketing widely targets children and this game educates this target audience about factors like the protection of their privacy and online marketing. It is called: "Privacy Playground: The First Adventure of the Three CyberPigs": "The game, created for 8 to 10 year olds, invites players to learn more about online marketing, confidentiality protection and meeting strangers. A guide created for teachers explains that the game offers complementary information, proposes activities and provides exercise material to use in class" (Réseau Éducation-Médias, 2009).

In Quebec, consumer protection also prepared a document for parents. It serves as a cautionary guide against marketing that targets their children, to teach parents to protect their children against this type of marketing (Le Cyberconsommateur averti, 2010).

13. Conclusion

The present report aimed to list the various types of advertisements designed to target and reach children. Identifying the various advertising techniques used helps in grasping the scope of the phenomenon.

To summarize, the impact of food advertising on children is an issue that has received a great deal of attention, for example due to the incessant increase of the global obesity rate. The present advertising environment is undergoing a radical transformation and we need to ask ourselves if young Quebecois are sufficiently protected from commercial pressures.

More and more, advertisers target children. Children's purchasing power is significant. Not only do they influence family consumption choices, but they themselves spend three billion dollars in pocket money per year in Canada (Minot, 2002: 15):

The nature, the abundance and the intensity of the food advertising directed at children are environmental factors which determine their consumption behaviours, directly influence their eating habits and, incidentally, their health. "[...] when you tell a child once to eat fruit, and you tell them ten times to eat chocolate bars, it is pretty counterproductive." Finally, "the primary mechanism through which the use of the media contributes to childhood obesity is children's exposure, starting at a very early age, to the billion dollars invested year after year in advertising and cross-promotional marketing of food products and children's favorite characters products." (Coalition Poids).

Despite the regulations and laws issued by several countries, advertising relies on various strategies to target children. The debate on children's ability to recognize advertising's persuasive dimension is still going strong. Advertisers quote studies that show how young children can identify persuasion in advertising, while other studies show that even at age 12, all children do not successfully detect this dimension. Kapferer mentions that the child is able to act consistently according to his opinions only by the age of 13 (Kapferer, 1985: 142).

The regulations that are in place in Quebec are a good start, but they should be updated and take into account the many media, platforms and marketing techniques used to reach children. This way, they will be better protected by the law and will have the chance to become future informed consumers.

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Appendix A

Table 1 – Advertising regulations in various countries

Territoire	Type de réglementation
Quebec (1980)	Prohibition of advertising directed at children under 13
Sweden (1991), Norway (1992)	Prohibition of advertising directed at children under 12
Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Luxembourg, Norway	Prohibition of advertising before and after children’s programs
Greece	Prohibition of toy advertising to children, between 7am and 11pm, and prohibition of war toy advertising at all times
Italy	Prohibition of advertising during cartoons
Finland, Germany	Prohibition of any advertising aiming to convince a child to buy a product through a direct offer
Finland	Prohibition of advertising where the sales pitch is delivered by famous cartoon characters or by children
Denmark	Prohibition of advertising featuring characters or puppets that appear in children’s programs
United Kingdom	Prohibition of using children’s celebrities in any ad broadcast before 9pm and limitation of the advertising of products that mention the brand
Australia	Prohibition of advertising during programs for preschool children

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