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# Polish Child as an Object of Marketing and Commercial Activities

*Polskie dziecko jako obiekt działań marketingowo-komercyjnych*

## **STRESZCZENIE:**

CELEM NINIEJSZEGO ARTYKULU JEST PRÓBA ODPOWIEDZI NA PYTANIA: KIM JEST WSPÓŁCZESNE POLSKIE DZIECKO?

DLACZEGO STAJE SIĘ OBIEKTEM WIELU DZIAŁAŃ MARKETINGOWYCH? W JAKIM ZAKRESIE MAŁY POLSKI KONSUMENT POZOSTAJE WE WŁADANIU KOMUNIKATÓW REKLAMOWYCH?

ARTYKUŁ ZOSTAŁ OPARTY O BADANIA ANKIETOWE I WYWIAD BEZPOŚREDNI, KTÓRE ZOSTAŁY PRZEPROWADZONE Z DZIEĆMI 4, 5 I 6-LETNIMI. BADANIA OBJĘŁY 120 POLSKICH PRZEDSZKOLAKÓW.

## **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

MAŁY KONSUMENT, SPOŁECZEŃSTWO KONSUMPCYJNE, KOMUNIKATY REKLAMOWE, STRATEGIE PERSWAZYJNE, MANIPULACJA

## **ABSTRACT:**

THIS PAPER ATTEMPTS TO GIVE AN ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: WHO IS CONTEMPORARY POLISH CHILD? WHY IT BECOMES THE OBJECT OF NUMEROUS MARKETING ACTIVITIES? TO WHAT EXTENT IS YOUNG POLISH CONSUMER RULED BY ADVERTISING COMMUNICATIONS?

THE PAPER IS BASED ON A SURVEY AND DIRECT INTERVIEW, WHICH WERE CONDUCTED AMONG THE 4, 5 AND 6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN. THE SURVEY INVOLVED 120 POLISH KINDERGARTEN KIDS

## **KEYWORDS:**

YOUNG CONSUMER, CONSUMPTION SOCIETY, ADVERTISING COMMUNICATIONS, PERSUASION STRATEGIES, MANIPULATION

**W**e happen to live in hard times. A man of the 21st century faces one of the biggest economic and financial crises, fear of job loss and lack of livelihood to provide for oneself and one's family. Yet, the most difficult crisis, especially for children and young people, is the modern dialogue crisis. Today's world lacks dialogical situations, gestures, glimpses. Our interactions are not real, they become more of a simulation. We take part in shows, play according to scenarios and play roles. We live in the constant hurry - "time is money", "time presses on", because "there's no time to waste" and we can "win some time". Even children are sucked into this stressful rush, especially into the one towards success, the so called "rat race".

We live in the consumption society, so we know how to interact with objects in the first place. It is things that became sacrum, they can be contemplated and prayed to. We can even say that we live for things. Many Poles today confess the religion of consumption. They "pilgrimage" to shopping centers, superstores, discounts. The main principle today is not: „Cogito ergo sum” nor „Amo ergo sum”. Neither mind, ability to think nor emotions, ability to love, not determine whether one is more, or less human. Today, I am as far as I possess. It is the quality and the number of things possessed that defines me before others. "Habeo ergo sum" - I have, therefore I am. So I am more a possessing object rather than thinking and feeling one. Others, when they look at me, describe me through the things I surround myself with. It is the type fragrances I wear, the pen I take notes with or shoes I run in the playing field that provide the environment with enough information about who I am and what I am like. Not many people perceive me as axiological "I", rather as acquiring, consuming "I". If I want to be perceived better, to be liked and valued I have to possess more. Possessing, especially for children and young people, becomes the only chance to promote themselves among their peers.

It is no surprise that in the Polish consumption society a child becomes the object of marketing and commercial activities<sup>1</sup>. There are whole shopping malls where we can buy products exclusively for children. At fashion shows designers present children's collections. Producers prepare special offers for young consumers (cold cuts, juices, cheeses, sweets, laptops, mobile phones, sport outfits). In most restaurants children can choose their meals from special children menu and while they are waiting for their meal they can play in a specially prepared playgrounds.

### 1. The perception of commercials by children

Children have gained the status of important consumers who can influence the shopping decision of a whole family. Kids are able to persuade parents into buying certain products. Moreover, they can list very effective persuasive strategies<sup>2</sup>: - "You need to cry

<sup>1</sup> M. Szyszka, *Child and Family in the Perspective of Social Marketing*, "Społeczeństwo i Rodzina" nr 37, 2013, s. 125-132.

<sup>2</sup> Children's answer are cited literally. The survey and direct interviews were conducted among the 4, 5 and 6 years old children. The survey involved 120 kindergarten kids. The detailed survey results and conclusions are presented in my book "W świecie reklamy i reklamożerców". See: K. Walotek-Ściańska: *W świecie reklamy i reklamożerców*. Bielsko-Biała 2010.

long and laud.” - “You can lay on the floor for a while.” (most children admit that this is ever less effective strategy) - “You need to keep asking long, grandma the best.” (so called “the nag factor” which is successful with many carers) - “You need to give your parents lots of kisses.” - “You need to promise mom you’ll behave well.” - “You need to tell grandma it’s your biggest dream.”

Polish advertisers are aware of how much children influence the consumer decisions of parents and grandparents. Thus, they began to treat the youngest ones instrumentally, like tools necessary to gain profit. They know children love everything that is colorful, joyful, dynamic, full of fairy-tale characters. So they create advertisements like that. The survey I have conducted points out clearly that Polish pre-school children like commercials and fully accept them. However, they do not understand (with few exceptions) their nature. More than 90% of children are not able to answer the question: “What are commercials for?” Yet, they can identify the differences between TV and radio commercials, between press advertisements and billboards. They treat advertisement messages as interesting (though really short) stories or movies, or backlit pictures. Why do children like commercials? Five- and six-year-olds say:

- “because they are colorful”
- “because you can hear so many nice, joyful songs”
- “because there are so many funny stories”
- “because they tell you which bars, candies or cheese are magic, they make you win”
- “because they speak about prizes”
- “because they inform where you can get presents”.

Children like commercials because everything goes well there, there are only happy endings, there is no boredom and loneliness. One can take part in wonderful excursions (Kubuś juice), sport championships between lions and kangaroos (Bakuś and Smakuś cheese). In commercials, the ordinary things: home, yard, kindergarten, store become the magic space where everything is possible. Children see that products change dull reality into a fairytale. And so an ordinary yard turns into a beautiful, green meadow with a dancing violet-white cow, where kids have lots of fun eating delicious chocolate (Milka). Children’s slide (thanks to Alpengold chocolate) can take you right to the Alpine peaks. You can try amazing: chocolate cereal (chocolate has been stolen from the Earth by aliens, Chocapic). By drinking certain juices you gain an extraordinary friend: Kubuś, Smakuś, Leoś. Kids believe in this joyful, colorful, idealized world absolutely.

They do not know what are commercials for, therefore they take each message literally. Simultaneously, they are open to new experiences and new impulses. This allows the advertisers to use successfully various psycho-manipulative techniques. Kids are easy to convince, simply by adding attractive gadgets like playing cards, stickers, cartoon figures to the advertised products or by giving a chance to win in a contest. No doubt, the persuasive impact of messages is amplified by presenting favorite fairy-tale characters: a crocodile, a kangaroo, a dragon or a teddy bear. All according to what pedagogues has been

saying for years, that there is no better education than through playing. Adoption of such convention in advertising, namely creating atmosphere where one can win something, cheer for somebody, experience something guarantees the success.

### *1.1 Children as young consumers*

Producers know very well that fun can be used to “raise” small consumers. So they present children with the miniatures of real cars hoping it will bound them with certain brand. They encourage boys to undertake typical male activities - do-it-yourself with plastic tools by certain producer. For girls, they prepare miniature cookers (of certain brand), irons, washing machines, vacuum cleaners. They hope the certain brand will fix not only in child’s but in the whole family’s memory, besides it will be associated with a happy childhood. Banks have toy credit cards for their clients’ offspring, on which proper logo is placed (to be remembered).

It is worth to note the fact that today’s children, though they still have strong need for experiencing fun, cease to be creative. They do not spend hours building new, made up block constructions as producers (e.g. Lego) “give” almost ready-made castles, race-courses, train stations. Puzzle parts grow in size, to complete the picture one needs fifteen parts instead of fifty. Creative thinking is not necessary to have fun playing in the yard. We have precisely arranged playgrounds with swings, carousels, climbing frames. Children rarely play “hare and hounds”, treasure hunt etc. They do not design their outfit for a fancy-ball, do not make paper swords nor princesses crown. Ready-made costumes and light swords are available in stores. Everything is ready-made and literal.

Cosmetic companies prepare offers for young customers. They can scent perfumes use creams, lipsticks, nail polishes - and all that for girls who are barely few years old. It is alarming that parents make such shopping decisions. Instead of chocolate or strawberry bubble bath they give their four or five- year- old girls manicure and pedicure boxes and thus show them how to begin the pursuit for beauty, prestige, certain status. They “enter” little girls into beauty competitions, few-year-olds learn to put makeup on and train to walk in high heels. They are impregnated with the belief that the prettier and more groomed they are the higher their value is. And parents are convinced that this way they guarantee their children a better start.

Beauty salons offer services for children, like ear piercing for girls from merely one- year- old. There are Kid’s Spa, booming in the West and growing in popularity also in Poland. Pre-schoolers know that not only what are the cosmetics but also plastic surgeries for. The terrifying vision of times when parents ~~will~~ pay for oto- or rhinoplasty of their children if they are not pretty enough, becomes real.

It becomes hard for children to remain simply children. There is a risk that they will lose their childlike joy, curiosity, ability to be surprised by the world, to ask questions, to be creative, to fantasize. The worst is that the other humans may cease to be the objects of their fascination. They will rather be others one need to compete with, for the pressure of success is great. Polish parents enroll their few-month-olds for English or



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German lessons, older children, that is three-, four-year-olds, for dancing, instruments play, martial arts etc. Small kids just do not have time for doing what they really enjoy. Parents, instead of loving their children, want only to be proud of them. We can observe competing fathers and mothers, thinking that the number of classes their offsprings attend proves their talents and skills. Expectations towards children grow, from the very beginning they are expected to behave like adults and to be success-oriented.

Children cease to be small *homo ludens* and become modern *homo consumens*. Instead of playing, they race, compete, fight. Instead of being creative, they imitate adults. This is a part of the cultural process we can observe here and now. Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska calls this process the “culture infantilization”: *As a result of this process the line between cultural and social subjects becomes fuzzy. Children become adults and adults infantilize themselves (...) Adults, not able to face cultural and technological requirements, escape into the childhood and blissful irresponsibility while children have to take on competitive fight and succeed ever earlier*<sup>3</sup>. “Adult” children more and more seldom play with teddy bears, preferring mobiles and their own laptops. They do not sing children’s rhymes but songs of adults. The huge interest in TV shows like „Od przedszkola do Opola” (singing talent show), „Mini playback show”, „Mała Miss” prove that the process of “children’s adolescence” takes place. In these shows not the most talented children win but those who best imitate gestures, speaking and singing habits of adult singers. Even the cartoon world is no longer fairytale. No longer are there popular Polish cartoon animals: Maja the Bee and her friend Gucio, Filemon the Cat or Reksio (the dog). Kids no longer laugh at Bolek and Lolek’s adventures (two boys, another popular Polish cartoon characters - translator’s note). Instead, they watch talking machines and miniature adults: Bob the Builder, Fireman Sam and Postman Pat (these characters have big heads, unproportional to the rest of the body, they are simply “adults in children’s bodies”)<sup>4</sup>. Girls do not hold nice dolls but walk with Barbie, who represents rather the world of adults than of children.<sup>5</sup> We need to remember that children

<sup>3</sup> *Dziecko w świecie mediów i konsumpcji*. Ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska. Kraków 2006, p.39-40.

<sup>4</sup> The characters of the media reality are described by Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska. See: *Dziecko w świecie...* op. cit., p. 122-149.

<sup>5</sup> Barbie is one of the mass culture icons. First doll was designed in 1959 by Jack Ryan for Mattel toy company. She was called after the name of the company founder’s daughter, Barbara Handler. Barbie has a figure of a model and collections of fashionable outfits for each occasion. She fits perfectly into the

strongly identify themselves with TV shows, fairytales or commercials characters, who become their models, sometimes for the whole life.

For contemporary children computer and television are windows to the world. They rarely discover nature by touching plants, trees, by observing birds - they would rather watch nature films. They cannot recognize the main species of animals but know the names of drinks, chips, chocolate bars. When asked "What is a mouse?" they point out to the computer one first. They know how to send an e-mail or SMS. They know what is a stock market and virtual store. They can play computer games for hours (instead of board games). The number of six-year-olds who have their own mobile phones and can use it perfectly is growing. At the same time they do not understand how much effort it takes to obtain financial resources to fulfill the needs of family. They often associate acquiring money with withdrawing them from the ATMs. "You need to press color buttons and money pops out. I don't understand why mom goes to work." - says Tomek (age of 5).

Parents ever often cannot cope with bringing up their children who force them, by screaming and tramping, to buy certain products, who want to have everything "right now", "right away". Psychologists have more and more work. Yet, such a situation should not surprise. There was no one to teach these kids to be patient. Watching commercials where everything happens within seconds, children begin to believe that everything is possible and getting certain product would guarantee quick fulfillment of their needs.

### *1.2 The influence of advertising on children*

When asked: "Do commercials tell the truth?" only one boy out of 36 questioned four-year-olds said that they do not ("dad says commercials always lie"). His opinion stemmed from his parents' shopping experience - a TV set they had bought was not as it had been presented in the TV commercial. It is clear that children are uncritical towards advertising. They feel disappointed when it turns out that the purchased thing does *is* not work miracles. Tomek (age of 6) states: "In general, you can lie, after all, they lie in television. I drank "Kubuś" juices and did not win the competition. I was last but one. I won't drink juices anymore."

Kids transfer their disappointment to the whole world of adults. They lose trust also in their close ones. The youngest do not understand the mechanisms applied in advertising, just like they do not understand their emotions and their parents' motivations. Thus, if they hear that "mom who loves her children gives them Danonino" they cannot understand why their mom does not do that. "I think my mom doesn't love me" - says five year old Ala. The arguments that she is allergic to milk do not seem to convince her.

Four-, five-year-olds do not understand why grown-ups do not want to help them and buy certain candies, chocolate bars (as by eating them one can be in the winners team). The advertisement messages clearly show that who does not eat certain products is sad, weak, loses and nobody plays with him/her. In commercials children are per-

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consumption and entertainment world.



It is worth to notice the fact that TV commercials do not opt for the weaker. In commercials kids play only with those who are strong and energetic. The one who is ill - is left alone, abandoned. Thus, advertisements also influence the shaping of the value systems.

Children encode the information: “do not make friends with the weaker”, “you must win if you want anyone to like you”. Commercials also teach children vanity, superficiality.

suaded to eat chocolate bars, chocolates, chips, candies, thus the wrong eating habits are promoted (with time the obese girls and boys will be offered the whole range of slimming products: teas, pills, creams etc.) Commercials present gluttony as something positive, encourage to delight in goodies, chips. The message that they send to children and youth should be formulated as: “If you want to be noticed, strong, liked, if you want to win - eat sweets!”. If a child hears that eating chips guarantees great fun, he or she cannot understand why mom does not want to buy it. Children begin to believe that the amount of love is measured by the number of presented bars, chocolates or candies. One can even dare to say that commercials, especially the TV ones, spoil relations between parents and children, often they are the cause of conflicts. Parents warn: “Don’t eat chocolate bars and chips because they are not healthy, they contain fat, preservatives, cause tooth decay” and commercials “say”: “This is delicious, it will give you strength, friends. There are chips, there is a party”. Children try out a product, it turns out to be tasty and then they simply yield to advertising suggestions.

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Commercials keep children convinced that others do not appreciate us for who we are but for what we have. Children’s identity is being built by things they own or want to

own-preschoolers see, for example, that products help in overcoming shyness, making friends. Children believe that a cup of tea changes the reality and creates family bonds. Parents' love begins to be measured by the number of purchased products. Things replace kind words and tenderness. The archetype of family begins to have the economic value. In commercials family and family relationships are deepened through consumption. Mothers understand their children because they give them delicious yoghurts, "Toffifee" candies, cookies and puddings. Spouses relationships are based on eating cornflakes together, while drinking "special" tea is the foundation for relations between grandfathers and grandchildren. Thus, relationships are built through groceries and objects. The world of values contains not only mother, father and children but also products adopted into family.<sup>6</sup> Narrators of advertising messages suggest which products make us form a happy, joyful, healthy family.

Kids understand advertising images literally while concurrently learn through observation. By watching commercials they begin to believe that certain product may guarantee happiness. They are at the same time convinced that their parents should be like those presented in commercials. Children take the image of family shown in commercials as the model one. When asked: "What should mom do at home?" they list: clean, cook, iron, wash dad's shirts. "And dad, what is his job?" - first of all to advise, to decide and to make a career. In commercials boys and men are more important, interesting as they can compete, they jump on bungee, train mountain climbing (women need to be taken into the mountains with a car), they are brave, not afraid of risk and - the most important - they have the right to discover secrets, explore the world, stay outside the house. Children see that men (in commercials) rarely stay at home, do not cook, clean, do the laundry.

Advertisements preserve the stereotypical view of genders, affect the way children think about family and male-female relationships. Tomek (age of 5) says: "A man can leave a woman, for example when she has no idea what to cook"<sup>7</sup>. Ola (age of 6) states: "Ladies need to look nice to have a husband. They need to put on different creams and put on makeup" (thus, the priority for women is to be attractive to men) and then to fulfill the role of a housewife). We can see clearly how strongly the images watched by children impact their psyche. And the beliefs regarding social and family roles, internalized in the childhood are of a very lasting character. What children see and observe they accept as ready, obvious and unquestionable.

Detailed study of the influence of advertising messages on children is extremely difficult, as it involves the analysis of both, that what is conscious and that what is not fully aware. This is one of the reasons why I not only talked to children but also worked with them through the project method. Forty preschoolers watched the block of sixteen TV commercials addressed to children. After the projection kids drew what they had remembered from the spot they liked best. Then I interviewed them individually about

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<sup>6</sup> Anna Leszczuk-Fiedziukiewicz writes about family bonds in TV commercials. See: *Dziecko w świecie mediów i konsumpcji*. Ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska. Kraków 2006, p.39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Children's answer are cited literally.



the drawings. It turned out that TV spots evoked many emotions and associations in the children. Preschoolers compared the commercial world to their own one. All discrepancies seemed very disturbing to them - the fact that children in ads have better toys and clothes, that other parents (the commercial ones) happily buy their children toys, snacks, even that girls in cheese commercial have long hair (Zosia, age of 5: "I have short hair, I can't wear nice hair clips and bands because I don't eat these cheese).

The drawings of four-, five- and six-year-olds reflected what they had remembered from their favorite commercials. Karolinka drew a princess-doll: "I wish I had such a doll because she is pretty and has long hair and nice clothes. I wish I could be just like that, I would have friends and kids would play with me." Over 60% of the interviewed children expressed the belief that only those who are pretty and strong, and those who own nice, expensive things may be liked (and such friends they would also like to have). Television messages strengthen this belief. In commercials nobody plays with ugly, weak or sick children (e.g. those who do not eat yoghurts, bars, chocolates or do not drink certain juices, drinks); only the little owners of certain brand toys are happy. It turns out that children take these messages literally.

Six-year-old Patrycja drew a huge cup of tea sitting on a table (she did not keep the right proportions - the cup was bigger than the table). She said: "My parents always work, we don't sit at the table like that. In this ad they have such a tea that makes everybody stay together and laugh. I wish I had that tea, it is magic. If I had it we would be together." Children of overworked parents who do not have time for common meals, for showing affection feel sad and sorry that their homes are not like the ones in commercials. Yet, they think that the only reason for this situation is the lack of magical means.

Ania drew beautiful, colorful world and explained: "I'd like to live in such a commercial. You are merry there and you can smile and no one spits on you. I'd rather live in such a commercial." Oliwia drew colorful puppies: "This is the ad of puppies who listen to the owner and do what he tells them. They wag and bark. I'd like to have a puppy like that so there would be someone who listens to me. Nobody listens to me now."

Four-, five- or six-year-olds painfully experience the fact that the beautiful, fairytale world presented in commercials is not their world, and they do not understand why it is so.

Boy's drawings differed from those made by girls. Piotruś drew a TV set and said: "I like the ad of this store with TVs and radios and other devices. It tells about idiots and is funny. I like the word "idiot". The teacher says one cannot say that. I don't believe her, they say that in television."

For children, the border between the reality and advertising world becomes fuzzy. They are not able to look at commercial messages critically. Simultaneously, advertisements penetrate children's culture, language, impact the way preschoolers think and behave.

Bartuś (short, very shy five-year-old boy, went to pre-school class a year earlier) drew fighting monsters, explaining: "I like Gormiti ads best. I wish so much I had the Fire Gormiti, he is very strong. He would help me to win sometimes. I don't know why mom doesn't want to buy me one. I think she doesn't want me to win. I would buy Gor-

miti to my children so they would be strong and no one would poke them.” Boys’ drawings are dominated by the motives of fight and shooting. Dawid: “I like games commercials. The ones where you fight and shoot tanks the most. In such a game I’m strong, I knock down others. I’d like to learn that.” Mateusz: “I like the ads where they fight. They are cool. There is a lot of fire and the killed ones. They show how to fight, to win and what you need to eat to win. I’m a boy and I must know how to fight.”

Boys' drawings show how easily children identify themselves with aggressors. They treat violence as something obvious, common. They sense that in today's world one must be like that (“a boy must know how to shoot”). The images of fight, violence, shooting watched in commercials strengthen this belief. And for example the TV spot of “Frugo” drinks presents a boy squashing the head of an adult with the can and saying the slogan: “Frugo - no limits”.

Along with a call to consumption, commercials shape the attitudes and form the hierarchy of values. Boys easily draw conclusions from this ad's world, they internalize information that one must be physically fit, strong, often aggressive trouble maker. They want to get products that will allow them to approach this (doubtful) ideal.

When asked: “What is not manlike?” five-year-old boys answered decisively and without hesitation. Their list included: pink color, playing with dolls, crying, losing, “sitting still” (that is, being passive), “hanging out” with girls (the sense of value resulting from being a male is extremely strong).

It is also worth to look closer at boys assortment in clothing stores. It is hard to find there boys t-shirts (for four-, five-year-olds) with flowers, hearts or cute animals design but one can easily get clothes with soccer players, monsters, dinosaurs or brave heroes. The dominating colors of jackets, sweatshirts or trousers are black, navy, khaki, grey, brown. Toys departments offer a wide range of vehicles (cars, airplanes, buses, trains), military toys (tanks, helmets, weapon, ammunition, toy soldiers), fighting heroes (who look like monsters): Gormiti, Spiderman, Action Man, Batman, predatory animals and building blocks.

No wonder, boys enjoy the commercials presenting their peers doing sports, competing and winning (of course, thanks to consuming certain products) more. Even the superficial analysis of those communiqués addressed to little men allows for conclusions that boys have to be physically fit, sometimes aggressive. Surely, commercials refer to the stereotypes, more, they strengthen them.

When I was observing children as they were watching the prepared set of commercial spots, I had an impression they were entranced. Kids are able to stay focused only for a short while and the stories presented in ads last no longer than 30-45 seconds. Thus, children easily remember advertising messages, especially the cheerful, colorful ones, accompanied by “catchy” music. They enjoy the world where everything is instant like with the use of a magic wand (the good wins, villains are punished, the story is quickly solved). They can recall all the details of the “commercial world”, they remember what color was the t-shirt of spot's character, what kind of shoes he wore, which way the trip route led etc. They remember precisely product's package - its shape and color. They find it much harder to repeat its name. The advertisers know this and use certain strategies affecting the memorizing process. The

best way is to interweave the product or the brand in the narration. Children know very well who is Kubuś, Leon or Bakuś. Naming the story characters identically with the products or brands turns out to be the best strategy. If kids like the character, they will remember it and will transfer their sympathy onto the product.

These strategies are used in Ivan Pavlov's experiments on classical conditioning. The kids experience, first, an unconditioned stimulus (which refers to the primary, natural needs). They are shown the image of fun, adventure - things children always associate with something nice, enjoyable, joyful. In this case the following model occurs:

**US (unconditioned stimulus) = UR (unconditioned response)**  
**The scene presenting fun, adventure - sense of satisfaction, pleasure**

Pic. 1 Classical conditioning model.

Pavlov proved that frequent experiencing a conditioned stimulus connected with an unconditioned stimulus, aligned in time, eventually evokes certain reaction, also after experiencing only the conditioned stimulus.

The reactions may be presented as following:

**CS (conditioned stimulus) + US (unconditioned stimulus) = CR (conditioned response)**  
**Chocolate bar X + The scene presenting fun, adventure = pleasure**

Pic. 2 The illustration of classical conditioning of positive emotions in advertising addressed to children.

With time, the conditioned stimulus, that is advertised chocolate bar, will cause the response similar to the one evoked in children by the unconditioned stimulus (the image of having fun). Thus, basing on the law of contagion, the authors of commercials teach young consumers the "desired" behaviors. They also know how to use the knowledge about Thorndike's instrumental conditioning - they strengthen the connection between the stimulus and response by applying the reinforcing stimulus after the latter.<sup>8</sup> For example, after purchasing the certain amount of bars a child receives the figure of a pirate or a playing card with superheroes (procedure of fixed proportions). A child can also take part in a lottery with very attractive awards: a trip to Disneyland or collection of dinosaurs (procedure of variable time intervals<sup>9</sup>).

Let us remember that children are not merely helpless victims of "commercial persuasion", recipients of advertising messages but also their characters. Children and little animals: kitties, puppies, baby alligators, hedgehogs, ducklings show up in

<sup>8</sup> Anna Jachnis and Jan Terelak write about the use of behaviorism in advertising. See: A. Jachnis, J. Terelak: *Psychologia konsumenta i reklamy*. Bydgoszcz 1998, p.20-30.

<sup>9</sup> This random method of rewarding allows for motivating customers without incurring high costs. One, very attractive prize usually evokes high motivational tension.

commercials in order to convince both, the little ones and their parents. In 1943 Konrad Lorenz first described the factor evoking instinctive behaviors directed towards showing care to other, immature individual.<sup>10</sup> An infant or a little child evokes in us the feeling of tenderness, we want to hug it, our aggressive impulses are hindered. We are moved by the soft shapes and features, deep-set eyes, imprecise, clumsy moves. Therefore, it should not surprise that toddlers appear not only in diapers, skin care products, porridge, juices advertisements but also in those promoting banks or sales networks. There is hope that all positive emotions and uncritical sympathy will be transferred from a child to the product, institution.

Adults, though they understand the goal of advertising, still yield under its influence, let alone children who are helpless against it. Advertising is a part of kids education today, ads show them how the present world functions. Little humans shape their future personality pattern, to a great extent, on the basis of the "watched" images of the world. Media "hand" them the image of good and bad, happy and unhappy man. Few-year-olds become dazed "video children" addicted to the video world.<sup>11</sup> They often think life itself is a game in which they have many "lives" and many personalities. Yet, they do not know which of these worlds to face - the real or the virtual one. They do not know which image belongs to their "I" and which not.

### Conclusions

What do Polish children see in commercials, TV spots in particular? The conclusions drawn by me during my interviews with the preschoolers and first grade pupils are the following:

1. One must be the strongest, the best - only then others like and notice you (Actimel, Monte, Lipon, Kubuś juice ads).
2. If you want to present someone with the most precious gift - you give him/her things or tasty food.
3. Today, only those who are well dressed and own exceptional objects are valued.
4. You must eat sweets in order to have interesting ideas and win.
5. You can make a mess, after all in commercials it is mom who cleans up, of course, with "magic" helpers (e.g. in Pronto cleaning products advertisements mother runs all over the house happily cleaning everything her son soils).

Thus, there is no doubt that Polish children are the puppets in the hands of promotion specialists. Of course, it is impossible to deprive children of the access to the commercial world, the realm of rhythmical music, joyful teddy bears playing soccer, dragons and kangaroos, magic chocolate or yoghurts. But we can help them understand the advertising mechanisms, especially as the emotions aroused by commercial messages remain long in their psyche.

<sup>10</sup> See: D. Doliński: *Psychologia reklamy*. Wrocław 1998, p.135-141.

<sup>11</sup> The influence of television on the life of modern men is analyzed by Giovanni Satori. See: G. Satori: *Homo videns. Telewizja i postmyślenie*. Warszawa 2007.

The results of the conducted research clearly show that childhood is being increasingly commercialized. From their earliest years children are educated to be brand-aware consumers. Promotional gadgets, gifts, vouchers, invitations to take part in competitions and games have become permanent component of their world. Children with whom I worked (vast majority) did not evaluate things in terms of their quality, usefulness or the way they were made. Value, attractiveness of those objects resulted rather from images created in advertising messages (known to the children) or were associated with valued brands.

There is no doubt that children, remaining under the persuasive influence of advertisements are helpless, they do not understand manipulation mechanisms. Advertising messages affect the way children perceive the world. Those who took part in the research explained their failures with the lack of certain material things. Commercial spots characters often become authorities.

The research results show that advertising affects also the process of creating value hierarchies by children (with objects ever more frequently to be placed on the top). Through things children negotiate their position (especially in peer groups).

Explaining (by parents, teachers) the strategies of influence on consumers is the only-mean to minimize the negative impact of advertising messages on children's emotional development. ■

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