



## **ADVERTISING AND TELEVISION CONTENT FOR CHILDREN IN ARGENTINA:**

From young viewer to  
multi-screen user

## **PUBLICIDAD Y TELEVISIÓN EN CONTENIDOS PARA LOS NIÑOS EN ARGENTINA:**

Del joven espectador al  
usuario multipantalla

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## RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina dos programas televisivos representativos de la cultura infantil Argentina actual que son comparados a partir de sus aparentes fines opuestos: mientras que el primero pertenece a un canal privado, el segundo se ubica en la grilla del canal infantil dependiente del Ministerio de Educación Nacional (Paka Paka). Durante cuatro meses fueron grabados los capítulos de ambos programas con el fin de comprender qué mecanismos y estrategias utiliza la televisión a la hora de interpelar a un niño/a multimedial inmerso en un ecosistema comunicativo. Los resultados obtenidos nos dejan ver que la televisión utiliza su espacio para conectar y derivar constantemente a sus espectadores hacia nuevas pantallas donde podrán consumir el producto de múltiples maneras.

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyze two representative television programs of the current Argentina children's culture, they have been compared based on their apparently opposite goals: whilst the first one is part of a private channel, the second one is embedded in the kid's channel ("Pakapaka") which depends of the Ministry of National Education. During four month were recorded episode of both programs in order to understand what mechanisms and strategies used television when communicating with multimedia children in a communicative environment. The results show how the television uses its space to connect and constantly guides their young viewers to new screens where they can consume the product in multiple ways.

### Palabras clave

*Cultura infantil; Televisión; Interpelar; Niño/a Multimedial; Ecosistema Comunicativo.*

### Keywords

*Television; children's culture; multimedia children; communicative environment*

## 1. Introduction

The results that are shown here come from a degree investigation produced recently in Argentina for the National University of Entre Rios, north of Buenos Aires. In this essay, we have analyzed the strategies that two of the most recognized children's programs in today's Argentinean young people's culture, carry forward when they interpellate<sup>1</sup> their viewers. These programs have been compared based on their, apparently, opposite goals: while the first one is part of a private channel, the second one is embedded into the kid's public channel ("Pakapaka"), which is managed by the National Ministry of Education. By this comparison we seek to get over the false dichotomy "consumer child" vs. "child as a subject with rights". What we try to understand here is which mechanisms and strategies are used by the television when communicating with multimedia children in a constant communicative environment. Also how commercial and hidden advertisements are interspersed. The results show how the television uses kids to connect with them and constantly leads them to other media –the web– and new screens where additional content of the same product can be consumed, and where advertising content becomes more evident. This offers the audience the opportunity to continue consuming once the designated time frame is over and at the same time it ensures their fidelity<sup>2</sup>.

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1 The concept of interpellation is used in relation to Louis Althusser's theory. It states that individuals are transformed into subjects through the mechanism of interpellation, i.e. since we are named by an "Other", who designates certain features about us and provides us a place to shelter, in relation with those features. Althusser, Louis (1970). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Freud y Lacan. Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2008.

2 This multimedia strategy is now spreading to increase the opportunities for contact with the audience and make them loyal to the broadcast. See from Álvarez-Ruiz, Antón, "Perspectiva sobre el contenido de marca" in *Bajo la influencia del 'Branded Content'. Efectos de los contenidos de marca en niños y jóvenes*, Ron, Rodrigo, Álvarez-Ruiz, Antón y Núñez, Patricia (coord.) ESIC Editorial, Madrid, Spain, 2014.

## 2. Objectives

Analyze the strategies and mechanisms of interpellation that current children's television programs use to target at children.

Understand how the television manage to co-opt the attention of the new multimedia childhood and what kind of new consumer spaces they offer to their viewers.

## 3. Methodology

It is a qualitative research. For four month it was recorded every episode of the selected television shows to form a corpus of analysis. The programs were viewed, analyzed and compared for a year and a half.

## 4. Multimedia childhoods

Understanding the media and new technologies as the major agents of influence in the construction of a subject's identity -but especially children because they don't just live their daily life in a communicative ecosystem but are also multimedia innates- we asked ourselves about the new mechanisms which the current kid's TV shows must develop when speaking to these new generations of children.

Through the new strategies that children's television develops, an active viewer is created. He is expected to participate, even showing this participation as something "necessary", since it's what closes the communicative circle. With this new

perspective, children are named as "prosumers" or subjects capable of producing new contents based on what they consume. This is used by the television advertisements and programs, showing to the children that they are involved in the creation and, therefore, achieving greater identification with the content.

The research uses the concepts of "interpellation and ideology" developed by the French theorist Louis Althusser<sup>3</sup> and "subjectivity" taken from the papers of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan<sup>4</sup> in order to carry out a qualitative analysis that inquires about the construction of the new viewers, which are the children that, nowadays, are born, grow up and coexist in a multi-screen society, resulting from the rise of new technologies. In this context, consumption acquires different dimensions, whilst it's presented undercover and in a naturalized way. It is a place where television is considered by children as a screen that leads to new open windows, to continue consuming. The goal is the usage of television media to create a network that can explicitly manifest its intentions –superselling, creating opinions, entertain, etc.– but above all, it is a network that adapts to the context of today's kids, in order to mold them and get what they need, starting with a viewer and transforming him into an active user with the capacity of choosing and participating.

### **Implicit advertising message: the use of websites inside the programs**

During our study we observed that in both cases the advertising messages are not explicitly present in any of the programs analyzed. From this discovery the question

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3 Althusser, Op. Cit.

4 Lacan, Jaques, (1949). The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience in *Écrits: A Selection*. Paidós, Buenos Aires, Argentina 1988.

then arises about the strategies the programs would use to interpellate children as consumers without resorting to explicit sales.



***The main characters of "Piñón Fijo" (retrieved October/30/2015 from: <http://goo.gl/6kC89B>)***

Given that one of the analyzed programs ("Piñón Fijo es mi nombre" "Piñón Fijo is my name") had to withdraw from Buenos Aires television urged by problems that demanded a retraction on its image because some of the commercial content seemed to be too explicit in its programming, in his public appearances and in the products that were permanently advertised in the media. After this incident, once the show was aired again, it presented a marked change: advertisements within the broadcast were minimized and the presence of the host in the theater or in another event was exceptionally advertised (though in fact he still throws concerts and shows at

theaters, stadiums, etc)<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, in the case of "The Amazing World of Zamba", it responds to the interests of the Ministry of Education Office and from this discursive place, the explicit sale is completely censored. It is noteworthy that none of the children's programs broadcast by the public signal Pakapaka has advertising inside.

Despite these claims, this research could detect that both TV shows speak to a child already immersed in the capitalist culture, and therefore they treat him primarily as a consumer. This assumption in one side, and the censorship to explicit sale on the other, produced in both cases the need to develop strategies to allow them to interpellate the child as a potential consumer of its products, through new mechanisms which move the child's look into other screens.

To sell and advertise their shows and their products without doing it so directly, it has become essential in both cases the use of branching into other media. The main proposal is to offer children the opportunity to interact with the program and its characters mainly through their websites.

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5 Duek, Carolina. From Bajtin to Piñón Fijo. A study about the children television programs. III Coloquio Nacional de ALED-Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre el Discurso, Bahía Blanca, Argentina, August/4-6, 2005.



***The character of "Zamba" in a T-shirt marketed by the Government of Argentina (retrieved October/30/2015 from: <http://goo.gl/LyFdlf>)***

In "The Amazing World of Zamba", the offer is very clear: in many segments (spots), the viewer can see children like him participating in the program. As this happens, a voice-over tells the viewer how to "be part of that world", i.e. to actively participate in the show. In such indications, two elements become fundamental: firstly, to participate, the child will have to dress up as any of the show characters, what means that the viewer must have access to a particular product which enables him to participate (the costume). Therefore it is not "any type" of participation, but it is as a consumer. On the other hand, the announcer will tell the child that after he dresses up like one of the characters, he must "enter the site" of the program (<http://www.mundozamba.com.ar/>) and "upload" his video. Once in the website, the child will find advertisements about shows and events regarding the program. In this case two options appear: "Zamba's Amazing musical with Juana Azurduy" and "Amazing Pakapaka Park" and in both cases the "Tecnópolis" ad appears –which is a public



space created by the Ministry of Education Office– and once the child "clicks" on this option, it will appear a very clear guidance to all the proposals that can be found if the child decides to visit the place. While it is noteworthy that, in this case, all the events offered are of free admission, these messages are directed to the child as a consumer and enable him to find a path where he will come across a long list of merchandising about the characters which are indeed for sale and are part of the children's cultural industry.

Product sales and advertising messages are presented implicitly, in a disguised way and in a context where TV becomes the place of departure to new points of sale. These new points of sale or new areas where to advertise, will have the advantage of not having a specific screen time, as the child will be able to go there and watch them at all times. Each time the children access the site, there will be a possibility to encounter a banner ad that will guide them to new consumptions.

In this consumer network, television continues playing a key role. Among the authors we have resorted to in this investigation, we have found the following statement: "Advertising has realized that television has become part of the child's life since he was a baby, and as he grows up, he spends more hours a day on TV consumption, spending an average of four hours in front of the screen. The TV characters present an interest and prestige in today's society; they are in charge of reflecting the popular culture characteristics as well as teaching many of the social

standards. The market is another socialization agent that decisively affects the young and the building of their identities<sup>6</sup>.

Against this backdrop, the analyzed programs decide to make use of a branching strategy to expand their sales opportunities and child persuasion, since they are constrained from sales and advertising censorship which both programs endure, as stated previously.

In the case of "Piñón Fijo is my name", the sale of their shows, presentations and all kinds of merchandising is implicitly present throughout the program. It is present as an already accomplished action by the children that appear on screen and, therefore, take part of the program from within. In the vast majority of the segments that make the whole program, it is constantly possible to observe children of both genders dressed up in the presenter's costumes, holding dolls in their arms, etc. The strategy seems to be to show the consumption as an already enabled and accomplished fact. The goal is not to show what they can or must buy, it is to show them as owners of these objects, so who is on the other side of the screen can see this fact as something natural. At the same time, the selling of their shows uses the same resource: games segments are created (e.g. "Karaoke") and these are performed in specific places such as the theater where the entertainer's show takes place, or some space where the character's merchandising is visible in the background. This mechanism instead of showing and selling the objects to consume, presents others people in relation to those objects, persuading the viewer through the act of consumption by others.

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<sup>6</sup> Bertin, Noelia. Child's consumption and identity. The case of the merchandising of the television show Patito Feo from a communications glance. Bachelor Thesis, Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos. Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación. Paraná, Argentina, 2010.



***The character "Piñón Fijo" in an advertisement for a Brand of footwear (retrieved October/30/2015 from: <https://goo.gl/ZoD7ug>)***

In addition, in this program there is also a specific time where the characters invite the viewer to participate in the show by "sending a picture". For this purpose, they guide the child towards the website, giving some indications about what to do. Once on this platform, it is possible to find explicit advertisements not only about events related to the program but also about other products that sponsor it, that cannot be presented explicitly on air. It is possible to find here, an ad made by the presenter, for brands of shoes and diapers, brands that use the character as its "face"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The brands referred to in this text: Pampers diapers and Nico footwear. These ads could be observed in the old official website of the program. This page has been modified and is now as follows: <http://xn--pionenfamilia-jkb.com/>



In this brochure, “Piñón Fijo” announces an event sponsored by Pampers (retrieved October/30/2015 from: <https://goo.gl/UwCKM0>)

### **New childhoods, new interpellation strategies**

Understanding that the current childhoods are in constant contact not only with the television media, but with multiple screens (tablets, notebooks, cell phones, etc.) with which they can engage various bonds depending on the use these offer, help us to comprehend that, concurrently, the narratives and uses of the old TV screen have been modified.

During our research, to understand the ideological elements or objects<sup>8</sup> that are utilized to hold the viewer child in the selected programs, it was necessary to drill down and identify those interpellation modes which are repeated in each segment, and detecting constants that speak of an intention which prevails over others when it comes to subject the child. It was from this mechanism that we were able to observe a constant implicit interpellation towards the child as a natural consumer.

In these particular cases, both programs being composed by "segments" (closed narrative units that contain beginning, middle and ending), it is possible to see in each of them a distinct predominance, for a program that seems to identify the child as a consumer at times, the next moment it recognizes him as a future citizen, or it even mixes characteristics of both categories and holds him as a *prosumer*, i.e. a subject capable of producing a content which will be part of the communicational circuit later on, placing the child back in the consumer role.

In this way, they construct a childhood's prototype which is expected to meet certain roles. This prototype appears hidden under an apparent plurality, which in both cases is constructed in different ways; it is the search for a universal identification by infants but created from particular features. Through this strategy, they seek to highlight the individuality of the infant on screen, but offering the viewer universal characteristics related to the social group to which both (actor and spectator) belong. By this mechanism, the viewer is more effectively identified with what is going on the show, fulfilling his spectator role.

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8 Althusser, Op. Cit.

Beyond the specific interests of each program in relation to the place from which they broadcast (private channel / state channel depending on the Ministry of Education) both realize their need, as producers, to work with this "single/universal" and "plural/particular" dualities; these elements exceed their, apparently, opposite intentions of selling and forming opinion, respectively.

On the other hand, it is worth saying that two categories have been identified and mentioned in the analysis of each program. Both categories speak of the conception of childhood linked to new technologies: the first one is the "multimedia infancy" who is regarded as a *prosumer*, capable of handling technological tools by itself; and the second one is the "childhood as a television apprentice", capable of understanding the TV's technical language, and concurrently, having the possibility of being not only behind the screen, but in front of (or behind) the camera, always within the audiovisual product. In this sense, both programs show situations where the child is driven to film himself, talk into a microphone, being filmed by others, etc.

There is no doubt, after the route taken in this paper, that the old conception of the childhood born in the modernity, held by the key institutions of that time (the state / school / family) becomes obsolete before a new model of childhood born and raised in a multi-screen world, from which it is interpellated, and which does not require to be literate to be a part of it. Two of the authors that guided our research argue: "The children no longer match the representation of childhood constructed in modern Western society, so there are problems in treating them with the criteria that framed

this representation; criteria as innocence, naivety and development as an indicator of individual processes<sup>9</sup>.

Far from this perspective, both studied programs decide to return to the primordial image of an independent child, with a voice and an opinion of his own, with a place on the screen that emancipates him from the adults in many times, and proposes him a new relationship with them, not based on the authority of one over the other, but in the accompaniment. From this place two things are guaranteed: the safeguarding of a world created exclusively for the infant but with the inclusion of the adult in it, not only as a provider in children's consumption, but as an accomplice.

Creating a link between the show's characters and their audience based on the emotional results key when persuading and selling implicitly. In the case of "Piñón Fijo is my name," the relationship proposed by the entertainer to the young viewers is based on an apparent familiarity, but with a patronage intention, since behind this "fan" or "friend" ultimately hides a "consumer", to whom is offered –without an explicit sale, but through the mechanisms that we have observed in our analysis– the consumption of the character in various ways (multiple CDs, plays, dolls, costumes , etc.).

In the case of "Zamba's Amazing World" it is the same dynamic, since its first goal is to generate an emotional connection between the characters and the viewers, through various strategies. This will allow the child to enter a fanaticism circuit which, in turn, will enable him to naturally consume some of the program's proposals. The equation appears in both cases as follows: a child that evolves from the role of viewer

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9 Piracón, Jaime and Palma, Cristian. New children's subjectivities and audiovisual media. Revista de psicología de la Universidad de Chile. Retrieved October/30/2015 from: <http://goo.gl/9tFouB>

to follower, allowing him to enter into the "friend" category, and unknowingly in the consumer one, responding to the interpellation of an Other<sup>10</sup> who defines him in his speech.

When the characters of both TV series ask directly to the viewer to actively participate in the program, they give clear instructions about what to do. This is not just guidance, but there is an implicit censorship on what the child can, should or wants to show. In the case of "Piñón Fijo is my name" it seems that the "message" that the child sends –in a particular segment called "Piñón's answering machine"– is only read if it has a direct connection with the entertainer's character; while in Zamba's show, children who "send" their videos will have to be in certain character's costumes, even with "specific suits" –for all the ones showed in the segment are identical to each other– and reproducing situations they have seen on the program. This means that, although in its discursive appearance the program appeals to the "spontaneous" intervention or participation of the infant, after watching all the analyzed episodes, it is possible to knock down this appearance, understanding that in both cases, the kid is just interpellated in a given context and in order to strengthen a specific figure: the child as a consumer of the characters.

In Morley's<sup>11</sup> words, a kid's TV show could be part of an "innocent text" but, also according to the author, under this veil it can convey "a not insignificant amount of implicit messages about basic attitudes and social values"; we must not forget that

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10 The concept of "Other" (capitalized) is used throughout our research based on the theory developed by Jacques Lacan about the subjective construction on the individual. It states, as necessary, the intervention of an "Other" who will play the role of guiding the individual during his subjectivation. Its greatest example can be read in *The mirror stage, it can be found in Lacan, Jaques, (1949). The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience in Écrits: A Selection. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1988.*

11 Morley, David (1992). *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu Ediciones, 1996.*



subjects are constituted through any discourse, and as Althusser states "The ideology only exists because of the subject and for the subjects"<sup>12</sup>". In this case, both television discourses are built to implicitly interpellate the child as a subject of consumption over and over again.

The appearance of child on screen in both programs, responding to the interpellation call of Piñón Fijo on one hand, and Zamba on the other, establish the guarantee of a symbolic identification, required in every subjection process.

When kids respond to some sort of call by the characters of the shows, they do it recognizing their role as fans. This fanaticism bond is born from the interpellation that, as Subjects, the characters offer to the children. At the same time, the children's response is materialized because of the desire to be seen and recognized by the characters of their favorite show or TV series; such recognition occurs at the time that his speech becomes visible in some screen: the child becomes present in the place where he was summoned.

Another fact that was possible to visualize in our research, and which responds to the strategies developed by both programs to talk, persuade and implicitly sell something to the child, is the modus operandi of decontextualization of childhood. This is the main strategy that both programs utilize when interpellating the viewer. In the case of Zamba, real children who appear on screen do it in front of neutral scenarios, which are the same every time, and where the child is the only thing that changes. In Piñón Fijo, the context is given by kid's TV and movie's characters in the shape of dolls, decorative items, scenery, background banners, etc. Under these set

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<sup>12</sup> Althusser, Op. Cit.

ups, all sorts of personal marks are erased, and in an apparent diversity, far from highlighting their particular features, children become universalized under their role of consumers.

In both cases it was possible to observe the construction of characters as products, not only in terms of sales, but general consumption, since from a character that is born in the small screen, a shift to other media and spaces is performed. There, their image, already consolidated, plays a role outside the television discourse, but without forgetting it, as the TV channel-program-character relationship never ceases to be stated. This correlation is presented in both cases as a constant during the broadcast of the programs, since there are specific times when the viewer is "reminded" that what he is watching is not an isolated subject, but, like the viewer, it also has a "family ": represented by the channel that broadcasts the program.

## 5. Conclusions

We understand that the main characters of each program (now transformed into products) are built and exist under the necessity to interpellate children as consumers, in this particular case from two opposite places: the market and the State. Anchored in their own interests, both programs speak to a child already immersed in a capitalist political ideology that precedes him. They assume this existing and familiar feature for the kid, they use it and reinforce it through different interpellation mechanisms, and at the same time, they hide it, sheltering in the characteristic innocence of the targeted social group. In this sense, beyond the

concealment, it is possible to perceive a constant traffic of ideology, which as Althusser announced, becomes necessary when subjecting individuals.

The double referentiality, towards the characters and the channel that broadcasts them, is present in the subjection mechanisms when talking to the viewer child. This model, which contains the repetition and the assumption as key methods, helps to legitimize each other and allows branching to other channel programs, other devices, other products, etc.

The branching of both programs allows the ideological traffic in a "tricky" way and through new cultural consumptions linked to the hyperconnectivity, where the viewer is apparently free to choose what to do, how to do it and when. But at the same time, it allows the forking of the program, not only as a TV show anymore, but as product as well.

Both figures (Piñón Fijo and Zamba) have transcended one as a product in the market, and the other as a social, cultural and national symbol. In both cases it can be seen that they use similar resources, exploit the same tools and strengthen their discourses through the same media, the television, and from the same subject: the young viewer. While in the first case it was possible to see from the beginning the sale of products in relation to the character, in the second case, during the first years of exposure, Zamba's product stayed out of the market, since its image was only used regarding public and State events. In November 2014, the situation began to change, as an agreement between four ministries (Social Development, Education, Industry and Culture) was signed to carry forward the "Jug.ar" project, through which dolls and shirts of the show's characters were manufactured and sold. While the initiative was intended to strengthen the domestic industry and cooperative work, it only

materialized and made explicit the entry of all Zamba's products into the market competition. Now, Piñón Fijo and Zamba have another common space to meet and compete for the children consumption.

As a result of this research, it was possible to understand that the rise and steady growth of new technologies, instead of moving the young viewer's figure, transforms it and strengthens it, since from there it is possible to reinforce the child's identity in two aspects that define him nowadays: its relationship with citizenship and their role in the market. These two features constantly intersect, as there is citizenship exercise in consumption, and all citizenship is inevitably crossed by the consumption, and they both appeal to the same goal: the subject's participation. In this sense, the childhood is not just a part of this reality, but it becomes a social group of great interest in the summoning of both the market and the State to participate.

The viewer child category, characteristic of the television media, has been our gateway into the identification of new constructions that intersect and coexist when interpellating the current childhoods, immersed in a communicative ecosystem linked to new technologies. A context where consumption takes new dimensions whilst it is concealed and naturalized.

From the premises that we developed throughout our investigation, it is still necessary to continue investigate some questions that will open even more the study and growth possibilities of the media, advertising and childhood topics. We must not forget that this study decided to look closely at the media pole, as its questioning pointed to the strategies that the television discourses develop, based on their intentions, when speaking to the child in his role as spectator. We must now ask ourselves about the uses and gratifications that the current Argentinean childhood,

consumer of these discourses, makes with the spaces that the media opens, and the places it offers. In which way the appropriations of these discourses impact in Argentinean children's daily nature, and, perhaps most importantly, what stance should we take against a fact already installed in our society, if we must educate the new generations of children to allow them to answer these interpellations consciously. Thinking that children and teenagers can make a "proper" use of these proposals just by the mere fact of being "audiovisual innates", naturalizes a fact that far from being something that becomes per se, is something that is built, and that the media seeks through different strategies. At the same time, it implies the belief that by being born into a culture crossed by multiscreens and by the hyperconnectivity language, the child does not require prior literacy, as he can perfectly understand this world and actively interact with it.

There is no doubt about the ease of use that new generations have against this scenario, but despite this fact, we do not cease to wonder about the need for a digital education and literacy, that allows the child to understand his possibilities against the media proposals, and that guide him in his way so that these do not become automated facts. That may eventually be a "choose your own path" journey, where the child's decisions make a difference.

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