

A THEORETICAL REVIEW OF THE CHILD SOCIALISATION PROCESS IN SPAIN

A study of the actors and factors present in the representation of the family in toy advertisements

UNA REVISIÓN TEÓRICA DEL PROCESO DE SOCIALIZACIÓN INFANTIL EN ESPAÑA

Un estudio de los actores y factores presentes en la representación de la familia en los anuncios de juguetes



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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es trazar una revisión teórica preliminar al diseño de una metodología cuantitativa que nos permita estudiar cómo se representan las relaciones familiares socio-afectivas entre niños y adultos en la publicidad de juguetes en España. Se inicia con una revisión bibliográfica de la teoría sociológica para comprender el proceso de socialización de los niños y la influencia de los medios de comunicación, la publicidad y la familia en ese proceso. La contribución original de este trabajo no es presentar los resultados de un estudio, sino ofrecer un conjunto de suposiciones e hipótesis fundamentadas y preliminares que permitan el diseño de un trabajo cuyo objetivo sea identificar qué tipologías de juguetes usan una representación de la familia en su publicidad, cuál son los roles de dichas representaciones en la construcción semántica del anuncio, qué tipo de relaciones afectivas se ponen de manifiesto y cómo esto puede influir en el proceso de socialización del niño.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to undertake a preliminary theoretical review, prior to designing a quantitative study that examines how socio-affective family relationships between children and adults are portrayed in toy advertising in Spain. It begins with a bibliographical review of sociological theory to understand the child socialisation process and the influence of the media, advertising and family on that process. The original contribution of this work is not to present the conclusions of a study; it aims instead to offer a number of points raised by way of preliminary assumptions and hypotheses, prior to designing a quantitative and qualitative study which makes it possible to identify which typologies of toys use a representation of family in their advertising, what role is played by this representation in the advert, what type of affective relationships are considered in the semantic construction of the message and how this can influence the child socialisation process.

Palabras clave

Socialización infantil; Publicidad; niños; juguetes; familia.

Keywords

Child socialisation process; advertising; children; toys; family.

1. Introduction

In Spain, child socialisation process has been determined by an increase in consumption of cultural products from abroad, especially from the United States and Europe, as a result of the state of openness reached when Spain became a democracy. Television series and programmes, films, advertising and other audiovisual content have demonstrated a considerable US influence, as in many cases they have been directly of US origin.

The new trend of consumption abandoned a focus towards day-to-day necessity and survival (Cayuela 2012). From the 1980s onwards, mass capitalist consumption has focused on leisure, satisfaction, enjoyment and ostentation of social status, comprising a culture of hedonistic consumption. The reasoning behind it overlooks necessity and inclines towards accumulation, perishable trends, fashions, lifestyles, built-in obsolescence and needs created by a market requiring general consumption (Sassatelli 2012).

These external factors are conditional upon globalisation and the management established by multinationals, non-governmental organisations, transnational corporations, regional associations, communicative and informative emporiums and lobbies, among others (Martín-Cabello 2013). This economically and technologically generated process permeates aspects of the children's reference culture. For example, in Spain, from the 1970s, the radio and television acted as the most significant mass media and their influence was decisive in the socialisation processes that affect children. Nowadays, their place is occupied by the internet, mobile devices, television and the variety of audiovisual content designed for children. However, the media can

no longer be considered merely an actor of socialisation centring on leisure, but must be understood as being essential in the current lifestyles of boys and girls (Moyer-Gusé 2010).

One factor that reflects this reality can be found in the growing number of Spanish households with internet access. Between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of homes connected to the internet grew from 25.2% to 74.4%¹. As we stated earlier, together with the internet and the existence and use of mobile connection devices such as tablets, e-books and mobile phones, the connection to this circuit of virtual reality surrounds individuals, altering their lifestyles and, doubtless, also their worldviews and making it easier for them to access other cultural values and attributes (Greengard 2015). In this scenario, a period we can describe as cultural neo-colonialism, advertising is one of the most influential factors in the advance of globalisation, which we can understand as being the result of an accelerated consumer culture of tangible and intangible (e.g. information and services) elements (Wallerstein 2012). Advertising reproduces homogeneous discourses that can be spread or adapted around the globe. It is part of a process involving the homogenisation of lifestyles where ways of thinking, values and norms are directed towards fostering consumption and, as we defend in the assumptions stated in this article, affect the socialisation process of the reference society, influencing children and altering their culture of origin.

¹ Data obtained from the indicators report concerning households connected to the internet, published in 2014 by Spain's National Observatory of Telecommunications and of the Information Society (*Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información*). In: <http://www.ontsi.red.es/ontsi/es/indicador/hogares-conectados-internet> (12 May 2015).

2. Objectives and methodology

The aim of this article is to undertake a preliminary theoretical review, prior to designing a quantitative study that examines how socio-affective family relationships between children and adults are portrayed in toy advertising in Spain. All these factors coexist in a lifestyle fed by a consumer society. To achieve this purpose we propose the following structure.

- A. A bibliographic review based on the sociology of childhood: the socialisation process of children and the role of the media and the family.
- B. A bibliographic review based on the representation of socio-affective relationships of children and families in toy advertisements

3. Content

3.1. A bibliographic review based on the sociology of childhood: the socialisation process of children and the role of the media and the family

This first section establishes a link between childhood, family and the media, based on a brief review of sociological theories which analyse the evolution of the recognition of childhood, as well as the role of the family and the media in the process of the socialisation of children.

In sociology (Gaitán 2006), we differentiate between the socio-cultural sense of childhood and its sense of being a stage in the natural development of the human

being, as the first of these two concepts of childhood has not always been understood in the same manner. The first sense is understood as being a socio-cultural condition where children are social actors developing in a changing environment, subject to the history and interests of the dominant power and culture, whereas the other is seen not as a social space but rather as a temporary state of the social subject.

Until the 18th and 19th centuries (Rice 1991; Moscoso 2008), children were not deemed a social subject which had to be looked after. In Europe, childhood was a period that was socio-culturally distained by society and the value of children was dependent on their ability to work, act as bargaining chips or enter servitude (Goody 1986). It is during the Enlightenment where we find the first significant change towards childhood being considered in the way it is currently recognised. During that period, children were considered to be future citizens who needed a biopolitical education. This subordinated them as subjects to a specific social space, with a particular role and behaviour, with feelings, values and normative morals and with rights and duties that are interlinked with tenderness, a social characteristic given to childhood (DeMause 1982).

After industrialisation, it was decided there was a need to “look after” these future citizens, civil rights were established and biopolitical technologies were incorporated (Foucault 2005). However, it is important to recognise that each culture, society and era has approached its understanding of childhood according to a social space tailored to its interests and needs (Pavez 2012). Education and schooling were designed as suitable means for forming and forging ideas and ideologies, relying on hygiene, health, care, food, religion and supervision as systems and technologies for medical development and moral and behavioural control.

The idea which conceives the child to be a subject without determination, who must be directed by a form of superior authority, materialising in an adult or an institution (of adults), still partially remains nowadays. These stereotypes associate childhood with a need for authority and a lack of self-will and judgement (Pavez 2012).

Understanding childhood from this approach shows a preoccupation with the result and not the process. In contrast, there are also approaches that study the socialisation process and regard it as being fundamental in the composition of childhood and the future citizen. This process is seen as a learning process through which subjects are absorbed into their reference culture/society and learn through imitation, internalisation, empathy, reiteration and replication of the specific values, norms, behaviours, ideas, ideologies and attitudes of the relevant socio-cultural context.

At the current time, in primary socialisation, sociology (Berger & Luckmann 1984) identifies the family, peer groups, school and the mass media (Ferres 2010) as the main social institutions, while recognising that in non-secular societies religion is another of the institutions to be taken into consideration. From this viewpoint, the family, therefore, comprises the first institution through which children learn, comprehend and understand reality from the standpoint of the other. The reality, culture, religion, values, worldview and norms of the family will be instilled and infused within the boys and girls of that initial reference family or society (Schaffer, 1989). The father and mother are not, however, the only points of reference in the institution of the family. Grandparents, cousins and other subjects form part of the immediate environment, as do peer groups, neighbours and so on. Furthermore, for children, schooling entails a clash with the understanding of reality they have acquired

within their family, as they recognise that authority is not held solely by their family members. They learn other norms, values, ideas and worldviews than those of their family unit. They coexist with peer groups and with other structures of authority and power. They understand other realities and intertwine what they have learnt through their initial reference society and what they have learnt through the external reference society (Vásquez & Martínez 2005).

However, the role of the family in the process of socialisation of children in Spain has been affected by the considerable changes experienced by this institution from the 1980s onwards (Gallego 2010), such as the establishment of democracy, the country opening up internationally, the modification and alteration of the industrial and economic fabric, changes in the educational system and in freedom of expression, the democratisation of the media and the start of the move towards secularisation. All these factors have led the model of the family in Spain, over the past 30 years, to shift from a traditional extended-family model, with strong religious values and of a chauvinistic and patriarchal nature, to a highly diverse nuclear-family model. Together with this transformation of the traditional family, new models have arisen, deriving from causes such as the legalising of homosexual marriage, couples deciding not to have children and immigration and resulting in the increasing presence of single-parent, single-person and multicultural households (Chacón & Bestard 2011), among others.

In this shift, it is very important to highlight the changes occurring in men's and women's roles in the family structure. With the arrival of democracy, women evolved from being the "angel of the household" (Ruiz-Franco, 2007) to becoming fully-fledged citizens who were free from patriarchal guardianship (Cayuela 2014). Women

thus abandoned the single role of mother, wife and daughter to become professionals, members of the labour market, leaving aside their role as 24-hour-a-day care-giver and mother and adopting other behaviour linked to feminism, sexual liberation and American and European lifestyles. Meanwhile, men stopped being the sole source of family income and the financial contribution of women meant an increase in the family's quality of life and spending power. A middle class with similar characteristics to those of the American middle class began to form, as well as a lifestyle devoted to consumption as a way of living (Alonso 2005).

These changes in family roles had a decisive influence on the incorporation, through education, of new actors into the socialisation process. Nurseries and other family members (grandparents, uncles, aunts and other relatives), as well as fathers, began to act as care-givers. In Spain, involvement on a massive scale by men in nutritional, care-giving or domestic duties began only very recently (Nash 2014). These changes are vitally important, given that the values acquired within the family often contradict and clash with the values learnt at nursery or from a care-giver or relative. For example, it is likely that grandparents instil in boys and girls values and socio-cultural aspects from other eras, which can lead to a clash or confusion between these and the contemporary values of the reference family or those acquired by the children at school (Badenes & López-López, 2011). The change in the social roles within the family has modified the foundations of children's socialisation by including other actors which cannot be completely controlled by the parents. This has led to departures from the reference and family values detected by the children, as social subjects feel positive emotions towards those who look after them. Children bond emotionally with those who look after them, who defend them and who give them affection; this can be linked to one of the few characteristics remaining to us from our non-social origin and

derives from the only animal instinct that lingers on in us – our survival instinct (Eisler 2000).

The relationships between gender roles, stereotypes and the imaginary are equally important for understanding the child socialisation process. In Spain, as defended by Martín-Alegre (2011), the shift in these roles has meant the traditional model has altered, although it has not disappeared. These relationships are currently a hybrid model, between the traditional model and a model evolving from external influences. Thus, traditional roles have not changed completely and nor are they being replaced. Among current family models, chauvinism and the influence of patriarchy still continue to be latent in the collective imaginary when designating what a girl and a boy are, one gender or another, persevering in the idea of social inequality, not of physical difference. These inequalities remain both in the domestic and private sphere and in the professional and media domain.

Together with the family and the factors highlighted thus far, there are equally important factors which are exogenous to the reference culture and society. We are referring to the cultural interference caused, for example, by the globalisation process and the participation of the media and advertising in that process.

Among these factors, we highlight those referring to:

- informative factors such as the universality of the media and mass communication;
- the changes experienced in lifestyles and consumption arising out of the democratisation of information technology;
- the new understanding of family and family structuring referred to earlier;

- the panorama of changes with respect to dominant individualism as a social value; and
- other socialisation agents which are outside the children's reference society and introduce other cultural characteristics and other discourses and worldviews that can influence them.

3.2. Representation of socio-affective relationships of children and families in toy advertisements

As a starting point, the ideological position of this article recognises advertising as a key social institution in the current social model of consumption, to that extent that its aims are directed towards modifying perceptions and attachments. In this article, we bring together a series of hypotheses and assumptions about the study of children as the **target of advertising** (Johnson & Young, 2002) and, specifically, about how toy advertisements during the Christmas period portraysocio-affective relationships between children and families. We have created these hypotheses based on the results obtained in earlier research (Martínez-Pastor, Nicolás & Salas, 2013) and on a specific bibliographical review concerning the issue. From this starting point, we consider that the representation of the family in advertising is part of and perpetuates social values and constructions, as well as generating models for socio-affective interrelationships between its members (Arconada 1998; Gómez-Espino & Blanco-López, 2005).

Arconada (1998) categorised the family stereotypes portrayed in adverts, highlighting the mother/daughter, mother/son, father/son, father/daughter

relationships and those with grandparents. According to his analysis, the gender relationship between female characters reinforces stereotypes of beauty, affective-nutritional relationships and occupations such as homemaker, whereas the relationships between male gender characters perpetuate stereotypes of success, bravery or skill. In turn, the identity of the family is reconstructed as a cohesive body that consumes in unison, as is shown in adverts for board games where the family is pictured together in a domestic setting.

Among the studies that examine gender differences, such as those of Carter and Levy (1988) and Martin, Eisenbud and Rose (1995), we would highlight those which analyse children's uses and preferences when selecting toys, according to the children's gender and the influence of social stereotypes on toy selection. In the results of these studies, it is underscored that the children preferred the toys which had previously been branded as being for their gender and rejected those categorised differently, and that the children selected toys based on their tastes if these lacked a sexist stereotype.

Also along the lines of the study of gender, but focussing exclusively on studying one gender, we find various works, including Martin, Eisenbud and Rose (1995), Bradbard and Parkman (1983), Bradbard (1985), Miller (1987) and Cherney (2005). Owen Blakemore and Centers (2005) concluded that girls' preferred toys are associated with physical attractiveness, care-giving and domestic skills, whereas boys' preferred toys are violent, competitive, exciting and a bit dangerous. Johnson and Young (2002) concluded that in toy advertisements, an aggressive and over-the-top male voice was prevalent in adverts for boys as a representation of the male gender, as compared to the female gender.

Other studies have centred on how parents choose toys for their children and how they are represented in toy advertisements, such as the work by Eisenberg, Wolchik, Hernandez and Pasternack (1985) and by Nichols, Nixon and Rowsell (2009). These experts identified that although in institutional advertising representation of the parents is essential, in toy adverts it is normal to find the child with the toy but with no interaction with any other children or adults, and it is even usual for the toy to be shown without depicting the child, which means that in the advert, the social and spatial context tends to disappear into a featureless space.

Authors such as Millei and Lee (2007) and Sunderland (2000) have concentrated their efforts on another line of research and have studied the representation of the family in advertisements. They consider that when that representation is present, it is associated with caring for children and their education, enjoyment and leisure. At the same time, they conclude that when parents are represented in toy adverts, they are represented in different ways: as consumers, educators, protectors and playmates.

4. Conclusions and assumptions

Having completed the bibliographical review, we here set out a set of assumptions, hypotheses and starting points. These allow us to establish a set of reflections about how family is represented in toy advertisements and the study of this representation and are the result of an exploration of the advertising analysed in previous studies conducted by the authors of this chapter, such as Martínez-Pastor, Pérez-Ugena and Salas (2011), Martínez-Pastor, Nicolás-Ojeda and Martínez-Pastor (2013), Martínez-

Pastor, Nicolás-Ojeda and Pacheco-Rueda (2014), and Martínez-Pastor and Nicolás-Ojeda (2015).

The set of assumptions given below must be deemed an initial step, taken prior to a more rigorous study involving an exact determination of the sample, the selection criteria and the analysis methodology.

- The presence of the family in toy advertisements in Spain is very limited. In addition, the family is not present in all toy categories. In this initial exploration, we have detected that the categories where family figures are most present are board games, handicrafts and dolls. These reflect activities, which either have to do with the idea of gathering and interaction, such as handicrafts and board games, or are related to nutritional-maternal elements, such as dolls. In these adverts, it has also been detected that the socio-affective relationships between children and family members are depicted along with the values of competitiveness, fun and creativity, and with the emotions of happiness and surprise. We consider that, in order to test these assumptions, the design of a future study should contemplate an analysis of the presence of socio-affective relationships between children and family according to toy categories and establish which relationships are significant according to the gender of the characters and the values and emotions projected.
- Linked to, and perhaps as a consequence of, the limited presence of family members is the minimal presence of adults, whether these be family members or not. In the research conducted, very few of the adults identified clearly play a family-member character. Gender differences in this case are

accentuated, given that a father figure is present to a much greater extent than any other figures such as a mother or grandparents. As an adult, as was stated in the first section of this article, is deemed to be an agent for socialisation that acts as an authority figure and is a model for many essential factors in the socialisation of the child, we deem it to be essential that advertising for toys, as a socialising agent, increases the presence of adults in the adverts. In the same manner, we consider that a future line of research could focus on analysing the role of the mother in adverts targeting children.

- The limited presence of adults is also significant in the representation of grandparents. This also means there is a contradiction with the child's socialisation process as, as has been stated in the first section, the changes in Spanish society over the last 30 years have made grandparents one of the most important elements in the socialisation process.
- Another of the notable absences detected in this study is schooling and the institutions that influence children's socialisation process. We consider this other point to be very worthy of investigation, given that in educational establishments the values, norms, guidelines for conduct and so on that influence children's social context are associated and exported. One important idea to bear in mind, which is a result of the foregoing, is the role of advertising in shaping an identity for children which is contradictory to their actual socialisation context, as advertising for toys projects an individualistic, egocentric and egotistical personality for the child with regard to the child's relationship with adults.

- As regards representation of gender, the majority of the adverts are geared towards a traditional female depiction related to beauty, nutritional duties, cooking or caring for children and pets, which clashes directly with the changes experienced in Spain in recent years regarding the social roles of men and women, roles which, as we stated earlier, directly affect children's socialisation process.
- Among the values and emotions identified in the advertisements, we have detected that fun, happiness and surprise are those most present and that these coincide with the behaviour and reactions expected when gifts are received.
- We believe it to be essential that more exhaustive research be carried out on how children and the family are represented in toy advertisements since in this explorative analysis we have detected that the information in the messages is contradictory to the socio-affective relationships present in the current socialisation process of children. A final example of how the representation of family contradicts the importance of this in the present-day context can be found in the total absence of representations of homosexual, multiracial, multiethnic and single-parent families. This fact contrasts significantly with the reality of the present-day context in which children are living, which in other institutions, such as schools, has become much more standardised.

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