

● Carlos del Valle, Marianela Denegri & David Chávez
Temuco (Chile)

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Media Literacy and Consumption of Media and Advertising in University Students of Pedagogy in Chile

Alfabetización audiovisual y consumo de medios y publicidad en universitarios de Pedagogía en Chile

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this work, based on the results of studies on the mediating role of the media, particularly television, and advertising in different age groups, together with the need to discuss the processes of audiovisual or media literacy, was to analyse the patterns of media consumption among students of Pedagogy in Language and Communication, Mathematics, and History and Geography at Chilean universities. The objective was also to determine whether there are differential profiles in the use and consumption of media related to the future role of these profiles in the audiovisual literacy of the students. To do this, a non-random sample was used comprising 881 Pedagogy students of both genders studying at seven universities in southern and central Chile. The «media consumption questionnaire» was used for data collection. In general, the distribution of preferences by gender and degree course falls short of representing idiosyncrasy in terms of the media, and reflects outside realities that do not permit participation in citizenry processes to be strengthened in media consumers. In short, the biggest problem is that future teachers do not seem to have the tools that allow them to manage the work of audiovisual literacy since they themselves have difficulties in differentiating between information and persuasion in advertising messages.

ABSTRACT (Spanish)

Considerando los resultados de estudios sobre el rol mediador de los medios, especialmente la televisión y la publicidad en distintos grupos etarios, sumados a la necesidad de discutir los procesos de alfabetización audiovisual o alfabetización mediática; el principal objetivo de este trabajo fue analizar los patrones de consumo de medios en estudiantes de universidades chilenas y determinar si existen perfiles diferenciales en el uso y consumo de medios que se relacionen con su futuro rol en la alfabetización audiovisual de sus estudiantes. Para ello, se consideró una muestra de tipo intencionado que quedó constituida por 881 estudiantes de pedagogía de ambos sexos que cursaban estudios en siete universidades chilenas de la zona sur y central de Chile. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó el «cuestionario de hábitos de consumo de medios». En general, la distribución de las preferencias, tanto a nivel de género como por carrera, no logra representar mediáticamente la idiosincrasia y refleja realidades ajenas que no permiten fortalecer procesos ciudadanos en los consumidores de los medios. En síntesis, la problemática mayor es que los futuros docentes no parecen contar con herramientas que les permitan enfrentar la labor de alfabetización audiovisual, dado que ellos mismos presentan dificultades para diferenciar entre la información y la persuasión en los mensajes publicitarios.

KEYWORDS

Pattern, audio-visual literacy, consumption of media, advertising, students, university, pedagogy, critique.
Patrones, alfabetización audiovisual, consumo de medios, publicidad, estudiantes, universidad, pedagogía, crítica.

- ◆ Dr. Carlos del Valle Rojas is Dean and Associate Professor in the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication of the University of La Frontera in Temuco (Chile) (delvalle@ufro.cl).
- ◆ Dr. Marianela Denegri Coria is Professor in the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of La Frontera in Temuco (Chile) (mdenegri@ufro.cl).
- ◆ David Chávez Herting is a Master's of Psychology student at the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of La Frontera in Temuco (Chile) (d.chavez02@ufromail.cl).

1. Introduction

Several authors agree that globalisation exerts considerable influence on people's daily lives, both in terms of values and cultural expression (Girardi, 1997; González & Muñoz, 2002). One of the main vehicles for exerting this influence is the mass communication media, including advertising, when these media act as homogenisers of interests, behaviours and attitudes (Cid & E. Nogueiras, 2005). Such is the impact that the media has had that there is an assertion that the rationality of social relations today is based on the fight to dominate the symbolic media, and in particular the media of material production (García-Canclini, 1995).

Television in Chile has a penetration rate approaching 99% of the population (AIM, 2008), which is why it is obvious that despite the dramatic emergence of the Internet and in particular the impact of social networks, a large part of the population still consumes television on a massive scale; and in many cases a parallel consumption of both occurs. It is clear that a mass communication medium popular for so many years will have a substantial impact on the social and cultural plane and on the socialisation processes of younger generations, where it is even beginning to compete with the traditional authorities represented by the family and school.

We have only to consider the time spent by children in front of the television and the impact that this has had on the shaping of their forms of communication. Thus, we now have generations of children who repeat expressions from television series or who express their consumption demands in terms of the brands that are prevalent in the television advertising of the moment (Del Valle, Vásquez, Denegri & Sepúlveda, 2010).

In fact, several studies in recent years have demonstrated that children and adolescent audiences continue to prefer television to any other mass communication medium, spending several hours a day watching it (Livingstone, 2008; Marta & Gabelas, 2008; Medrano, Palacios & Aierbe, 2007; 2010). For McLuhan (1996), television has had a direct impact on the conceptual organisation of the world: the mosaic structure of television has supplanted the linear structure of the press, modifying the causal way people think in the West. This author also stated that the messages of the media are changes of scale, rhythm or patterns (McLuhan, 1996: 30), i.e., each medium contributes substantial modifications to the cultural and cognitive organisation of human beings. For Baudrillard (1974; 1978; 1994; 2002), television participates in the post-modern increase in «sign values», or

symbolic values, replacing the satisfaction of needs with the need for differentiation, thereby subjectivising the reality of the objects consumed.

Martín-Barbero (1987; 1996; 1999) indicates that in Latin America the media have allowed a «loss of centre» to occur, in which there is no longer a central culture, but rather an assortment of de-centred cultures, where democracy itself is constructed on the basis of the media's communication games, in the «nexus of questions and discourses» that turn us into political subjects. Therefore, the media co-construct reality together with the users, breaking the rigid traditional schemes that delimited «real» and «fictitious» through the existence of a mosaic of knowledge and thought, of territories and limits, of «intertextualities», which must be structured to the extent to which we interact with this mosaic via the new technologies, as well as via the new imaginations of our culture.

In this context, the family plays a fundamental role in introducing mass media consumption habits to children, particularly in the first stages of infant socialisation (Martínez & Peralta, 1998; Berenguer, Mollá, Pérez & Canovas, 2001, Denegri, Gempp, Del Valle, Etchebarne & González, 2006). However, school, and especially educators, play a central role in educating adolescents to think critically about the mass media (Berenguer & al., 2001; González & Muñoz, 2002), which enables them to order the «mosaic» of information available on television.

In Chile, exposure levels to children's advertising in the related segments are similar to those in the United States (around 10% at weekends, and 14% on theme channels). The most advertised products are food and toys, at 39.5% and 35.1% respectively (Uribe, Hidalgo, Martínez & Muñoz, 2006). This is not an insignificant topic, considering that children's advertising has been linked to poor nutritional habits in children (Halford, Gillespie, Brown, Pontin & Dovey, 2004; Lobstein & Dobb, 2005), and in Chile the empirical evidence points to a similar situation (Olivares, Yáñez & Díaz, 2003).

It has also been proven that exposure to alcohol advertising has negative effects on adolescent conduct (Anderson, de Brujin, Angus, Gordon & Hastings, 2009; Villani, 2001), which is not surprising considering that the mass media are intimately linked to spheres of peer influence, being one of the favourite subjects of young people (Gilles, 2003).

Furthermore, the media are so-called socialising agents of reference (in contrast to the socialising agents of belonging, like the family). These agents have an enormous influence on the construction of the adoles-

cent's identity and reality: a huge amount of information, values, habits, myths, beliefs and models and idols that can be drawn from the media can support the transition from childhood to adulthood (Gilles, 2003; Vera Vila, 2005). Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that the age of maximum impact and influence of advertising is 12 (Te'eni-Harari, Lehman-Wilzig & Lampert, 2009).

In light of these results, the concept of «audiovisual literacy or «media literacy» is crucial, as several authors have suggested (Buckingham, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2007; Livingstone, 1999; 2004; 2007; Zarandona, Basterretxea, Idoyaga & Ramírez, 2008). In other words, individuals must be equipped through a formal educational system with the «knowledge, abilities and competencies that are required to use and interpret the media» (Buckingham, 2005: 71); but to do this, contextualised incorporation is required (Del Valle, 2005).

However, the raw material necessary to obtain changes of this type are teachers trained in the critical analysis of the media. This type of education is not currently part of the curricula in pedagogy degree courses in Chile. Therefore, the aim of this work was to analyse the patterns of media use among students of Pedagogy in Language and Communication, Mathematics, and History and Geography at Chilean universities, and to determine whether there are differential profiles in the use and consumption of media related to their future role in the audiovisual literacy of their students.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The non-random sample comprised 881 pedagogy students of both genders enrolled in seven universities in the southern and central areas of Chile, corresponding to 21.7% of students of Pedagogy in Language, 39% of students of Pedagogy in Mathematics, and 39.3% of students of Pedagogy in History.

2.2. Instruments

For data collection, the «media consumption questionnaire» was used (Denegri & al., 2008a), which included 18 questions, of which 12 were multiple choice and 6 were open response. In addition to demographic data, this questionnaire also collected information about frequency and type of television and Internet use, including advertising recall and favourite programming.

Without media-literate teachers with the reflective and pedagogical capacities to address education within the framework of a critical reading of the media, children will grow up at an enormous disadvantage, unable to develop adequately in a competitive world highly mediated by consumption as the backbone of identity construction processes. One might therefore wonder about the impact that this lack of a critical view of the media in the basic training of our future teachers will have on learners, and how it will influence the processes of building citizenship in future generations, where the equation between citizen and consumer seems to be increasingly tending towards only being consumers

2.3. Procedures

A letter was sent to the Faculty Deans and Course Directors of all the Chilean universities associated with the Public Universities Council that offered the degree courses of Pedagogy in Language and Communication, Pedagogy in History, Geography and Civic Education and Pedagogy in Mathematics, in which the aim of the study was explained and consent was sought.

Once the study was approved, a database was requested in predefined format to prepare the final composition of the sample, considering the necessary replacements in the event of non-participation. Once the sample had been selected, the students were contacted personally, explaining the purpose of the study

and asking them to sign an informed consent, which authorised their being considered part of the study.

All the questionnaires were applied by trained interviewers and downloaded into a database for analysis.

3. Results

Two stages of analysis were performed in order to create a media use profile. First, the favourite programmes of pedagogy students were categorised according to the OBITEL classification in Chile, slightly modified, as will be seen in the following. Second, the students' attitudes and recalls in relation to televised advertising spots were reviewed. The results of this study revealed some very interesting data.

With respect to the programmes, the categories used were those indicated by the information from OBITEL (Fuenzalida & Julio, 2010), with slight modifications. For example, the subcategory of «star» was omitted as it is a commercial category that does not refer to the type of programme but to a preferential schedule, the commercial value of which is higher, and as such this would hide the real data. Likewise, the subcategory «entertainment» was re-named «edu-entertainment» to focus more on those programmes that provide educational content in an entertainment format, generally suitable for all ages, and that seek to grab the audience's attention through a light and funny presentation, rather than by its specific content. The following table summarises the categories and subcategories used.

The data analysis reveals results consistent with other studies. For example, it highlights that the favourite categories are fiction (44%), information (30%), and live shows (17%). The OBITEL national analysis (Fuenzalida & Julio, 2009) exposed the same preferences, with slightly different percentages for 2008 (37%, 25%, 21%, respectively); however, in 2009 there was a dramatic increase in the audience for informational programmes, surpassing fiction programmes with a total of 36.7% compared to 34.9% of the fictional programme audience (Fuenzalida & Julio, 2010). However,

these studies did not release any data by age group. Other international studies seem to show that while adults prefer to watch informational programmes, adolescents and young people prefer fictional programmes (Medrano, et al., 2010).

The differences by gender also seem consistent with the international evidence. Therefore, while the women showed a high preference for fictional programmes (48.7%) and almost zero preference for sport programmes (0.2%), the men were less emphatic in their first preference, with a relatively high prevalence of preference for sport programmes (36.1% and 12.3%, respectively). This is consistent with international findings, which show that, as they advance in age, women usually prefer soap operas or series types of programmes, whereas the men show more heterogeneous tastes, but with noticeable preferences for sports and series (Gilles, 2003; Livingstone, 1999).

It should be noted that although sport only represents the fourth preference for the men, as can be seen in table 2, this is a much less complex category than the others, which is why such a high number is significant.

Nevertheless, the most interesting differences are observed when comparing the results by degree course. Although the preferences follow the same order already established, there are some extremely striking findings. These findings, summarised in Figure 1, are related particularly to the high preferences for informational programmes by Pedagogy in History (40.3%), compared with Language (26.9%) and Mathematics (28.2%). In addition, Pedagogy in History is the course that watches live shows the least (11%, compared to 24.4% of Language and 16% of Mathematics). These findings can be shown on a graph in some emblematic subcategories: while Pedagogy in History shows a low preference for reality shows (0.7%), Pedagogy in Language reaches 5.8% in this subcategory. At the

Fiction	Film	Live shows	Game show
	Fiction TV		Edu-Entertainment
	Animated Series		Artistic Event
	Teletheatre		Show business
Information	Documentary/News Report	Sports	Humour
	Docu-Reality		Other type of live show
	Interview/Debate		Reality Show
	Informational Event		Talk Show
	News		Variety show
	Other		Sporting Event
			Sport Programme
Service	Instructional	Other	Infomercial
	Morning Show		Video Clip
	Mediation		Others
	Religious		

Table 1. Categories and subcategories of programmes.

	MEN	WOMEN
Fiction	36.1%	48.7%
Information	34.7%	31.1%
Live show	15.2%	16.1%
Service	1.4%	2.9%
Sport	12.3%	0.2%
Others	0.3%	1.0%

Table 2. Differences by gender in the favourite categories.

other extreme, while 23% of the students of Pedagogy in History indicate a news programme as their favourite program, only 14.1% of the students of Pedagogy in Language list this type of programme as their favourite. Mathematics usually falls somewhere in between (4.5% in the case of reality shows, and 18.6% in the case of news programmes). It should be pointed out that the subcategories preferred by the students are those of fiction TV (soap operas and series), news, animation and documentary/news reports. This last category merits separate mention since, due to its particularly scientific-humanist nature, the Pedagogy in Mathematics course is the one that reports the least preference for it (5.8%, compared to 10.3% of Language, and 12.3% of History).

The provenance of the programmes preferred by the students was also analysed, particularly in relation to the subcategories of fiction and documentary/news report, as these were two of the favourite subcategories, whereas of the other two, one (animation) is exceedingly international, while the other (news) brings together mainly national productions. The results indicate that, of all the programmes mentioned in the fiction subcategory, 39.6% were national productions, while 60.4% were international productions. In the case of documentary/news reports, a similar proportion is observed, with a 34.3% preference for programmes produced nationally, compared to a 65.7% preference for international programmes. This is consistent with the increase in the diffusion of cable TV in Chile, which for 2008 exceeded 43% penetration in Chilean homes. For that same year, 46.1% of the population were satisfied with free-to-air television, compared with 69.2% that were satisfied with cable television (CNTV, 2008). And several studies have indicated that the national soap operas,

which were supposed to be the greatest national strength in the fiction category, have been losing audiences rapidly in recent years (CNTV, 2008; Fuenzalida & Julio, 2010). All this seems to have a strong impact on the results presented, and indicates a strong dissatisfaction with national programming, replaced by the increasingly accessible cable television. This is particularly interesting, given that, as has been indicated by various experts (Livingstone, 2008), this type of media distribution does not really represent the idiosyncrasy of a country, and reflects external realities that do not enable participation in citizenry processes to be strengthened in media consumers.

In the case of television advertising, the analysis procedure consisted in calculating the frequency of the responses so as to then categorise them with the aim of identifying the types of products and services recalled. The next step was the perception analysis that the aforementioned sample had about advertising, indicating the function that this fulfils in promoting a product. The students were asked about the aim of advertising in promoting a product, through four response options that took into account the following functions: advertising as a source of objective information about a product; advertising as a tool that orients consumers' selection when choosing a certain service or product; advertising as a tool that compels consumers to choose certain product; and advertising as a medium with no visible use.

The information collected in both procedures was compared based on the gender and degree course of the sample. Around twenty categories were obtained that group all the commercials recalled by the students. These categories comprise, for example: «Banks», «Transport», «Television programmes», «Gas», «Sport clothes», «Telephone services», among others. In the comparison by gender, the women reported recalling

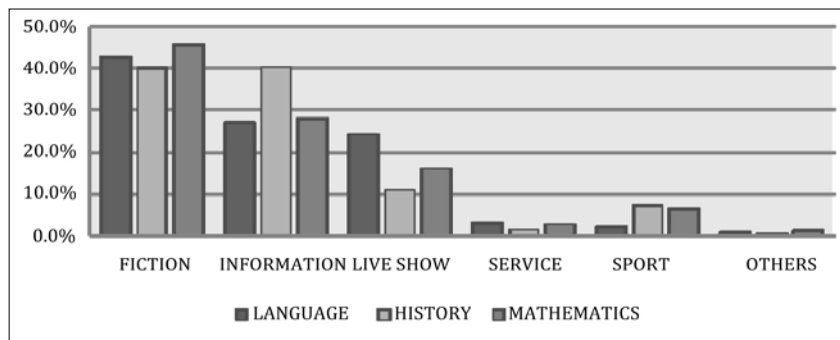


Figure 1. Differences by degree course in the favourite categories.

advertising about products in the categories «Non-alcoholic drinks» (soft drinks, juice, tea, coffee, mineral water, etc.) and «Personal hygiene» (soap, shampoo, deodorant, etc.) to a greater extent than the men. The men showed better recall of commercials about «Alcoholic drinks» (beers, wines, liquors, etc.), «Foods» (ready-made meals, vegetables, pastas, chocolates, etc.) and «Banks» (banking services such as consumer loans, as well as banking organisations). In the category «Stores» (department stores) and «Drugs» (analgesics, antibiotics, etc.), no differences were observed between the two groups.

In the comparison by degree course, the non-alcoholic drinks were recalled more by the students of Pedagogy in Language (33%), with similar frequencies being observed in Pedagogy in History and Mathematics (24%). The products in the category «Foods» were recalled most frequently by the students of Pedagogy in History (16.1%), followed by Pedagogy in Mathematics (11%), and finally those of Pedagogy in Language (8.5%). The commercials about the non-alcoholic drinks were recalled more by the students of Pedagogy in Mathematics (15.8%), whereas similar frequencies were observed between Pedagogy in History and Language (12%). Finally, advertising for telephone and Internet services was recalled most by

gests that advertising is an objective source of information was in second place ahead of the orientation function, and the students of Pedagogy in Mathematics were more inclined towards this option. These results are particularly troublesome, as will be discussed in the conclusions.

It is interesting to note that the most recalled advertisements were those whose contents were oriented to peripheral elements of the message – such as jingles, names, colours, animals, personalities – rather than the more direct elements, i.e., more direct information about the product or service. However, in many cases, these peripheral elements were associated erroneously to similar brands. This unexpected finding seems to demonstrate that national advertising is failing in one of its main targets, which is to persuade and cultivate loyalty in the young audience.

4. Discussion

In general terms, we can say that «schools have maintained a polarised position regarding their particular interests, letting the media in but without listening to them, analysing them or stripping the semiotic and communicative gearbox found inside» (González & Muñoz, 2002: 209), so that we can educate those most subjected to their influence to use them to their

benefit. Some authors go further, declaring it «highly irresponsible» (Kellner & Share, 2007: 4) to ignore these forms of socialisation and informal education in the formal education curriculum (Zarandona, Basterretxea, Idoyaga & Ramírez, 2008).

The results obtained in the present study seem to confirm these assertions in addition to

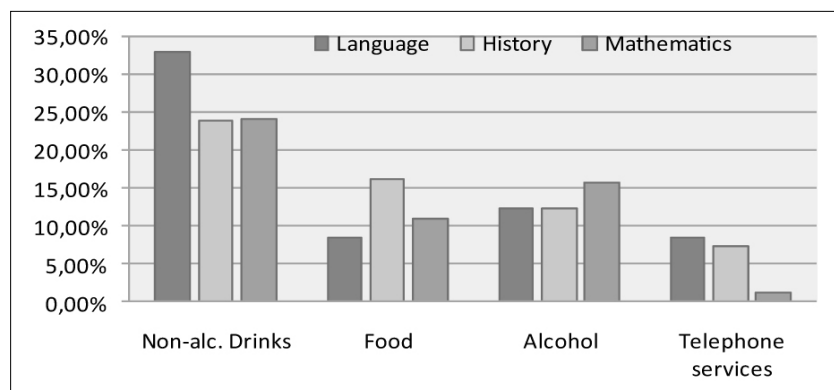


Figure 2. Type of advertising recalled by degree course.

students of Pedagogy in Language (8.5%), then by students of Pedagogy in History (7.4%), and lastly by students of Pedagogy in Mathematics (1.4%). These results are illustrated in figure 2.

When analysing the responses obtained about the function of advertising according to the pedagogy students, advertising was perceived as seeking to persuade or compel the consumers into choosing a certain product. The students of Pedagogy in History, followed by those of Language, were those that tended more towards this alternative. The alternative that sug-

indicating a profile differentiated by degree course. Indeed, it can be inferred that the students of Pedagogy in History appear to be the consumers most critical of the media, making ample use of the informational opportunities from both television and the Internet. It is both noteworthy and troublesome that the Pedagogy in Language course, which by definition is the one principally responsible for educating young people about the media, appears to be poorly prepared and with little critical consciousness for including and then mediating children's learning about the real

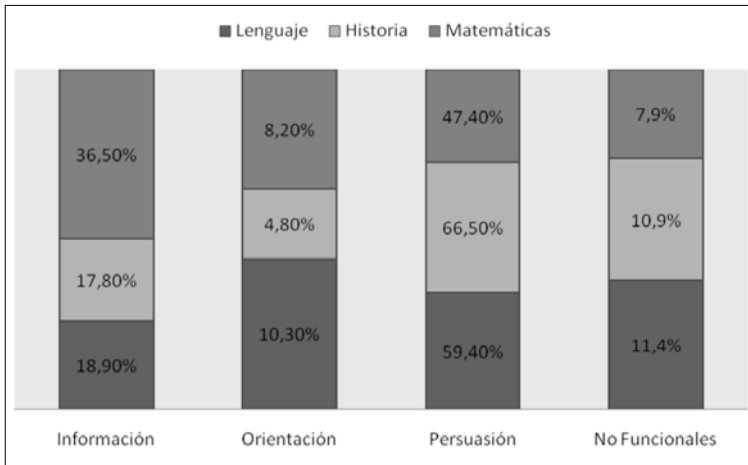


Figure 3. Function of advertising, by degree course.

function of television – which is currently the «basic» mass media. One finding that confirms this concern is tied to their low use of the Internet to inquire about topical subjects compared with the Pedagogy in History course.

In terms of understanding television advertising, an alarming phenomenon is noted: a far from negligible proportion of pedagogy students considered that the main aim of advertising is to provide information about available products. Although most considered advertising a tool of persuasion, the fact that the second largest group of students in the sample thought advertising was a means of contributing objective information about the products it promotes is an important indicator that reveals a distortion in the actual level of understanding of the true content and the manner in which advertising delivers this content, where it is clear that its main function is to persuade and deliver the content in a way that effectively impacts consumers. In fact, many pedagogy students –particularly in Mathematics– reach a level of analysis which, according to international studies, should be overcome as of eight years of age (Calvert, 2008; Pecora & al., 2007).

In this same regard, it is remarkable that the most recalled advertisements were those whose contents were oriented to peripheral elements of the message – such as jingles, names, colours, animals, personalities– rather than the more direct information about the product or service, and these were even wrongly associated with similar brands. This finding would seem to reaffirm the conclusion of an extremely passive and uncritical position about the advertising message, which makes one more susceptible to influence via the less reflective routes of information processing. Although we raised it previously, this could show a

weakness in the formulation of the messages in national advertising. It also sheds light on the nature of information processing by young consumers and is an issue that other investigations will need to explore further.

Nevertheless, there is common ground. In all the degree courses, a very similar scenario of preferences was formed. However, the Chilean television programme offering appears to have little relevance to these preferences, with media needs having been supplanted by international channels, which appears consistent with various national reports.

tent with various national reports.

In this globalised world, it is fundamental that teachers contribute to children's ability to sort through the information mosaic provided by the mass communication media, to view it critically. It seems basic that they be at least able to function with reasonable ease when watching television.

Also, teaching about advertising is relevant to students' education as informed and not passive consumers, since it allows them to confront the negative effects that this produces on people and society. According to Araque (2009), five effects of commercial advertising can be clearly identified: 1) It tends to reproduce the roles traditionally associated with responsibilities differentiated between men and women, which does not respond to the present needs of gender equality; 2) Advertising used to promote toys in particular resorts to measures that disguise the reality of products, which is known as misleading advertising; 3) The idea is given that problems are solved through the acquisition and use of a certain product; 4) It homogenises the population of many countries in their behaviours and interests so that they consume similar products; 5) Commercial advertising, in order to increase impact and effectiveness, uses sex and the body as a lure through attractive male and female models, provoking in other people dissatisfaction with their own body.

On this basis, students must be educated to be able to interpret critically and actively the sources of information and particularly the persuasive messages that come from advertising. However, as we have seen in this study, future teachers do not seem to have the tools to manage the work of audiovisual literacy, since they themselves have difficulties in differentiating

between information and persuasion in advertising messages.

From the results obtained, the evidence suggests that Chilean teachers are not receiving the basic training necessary to fulfil the role of mediators in the construction of a critical view of the media in the classroom, but instead they conceive it as a mere work tool, without understanding its function as a socialising and educational agent (Camps, 2009).

Without media-literate teachers with the reflective and pedagogical capacities to address education within the framework of a critical reading of the media, children will grow up at an enormous disadvantage, unable to develop adequately in a competitive world highly mediated by consumption as the backbone of identity construction processes. One might therefore wonder about the impact that this lack of a critical view of the media in the basic training of our future teachers will have on learners, and how it will influence the processes of building citizenship in future generations, where the equation between citizen and consumer seems to be increasingly tending towards only being consumers (Denegri & Martínez, 2004).

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