

## **Gender portrayals in food commercials: A content analysis of Spanish television advertisements**

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### **Abstract**

Content analysis of media messages from a gender perspective has a long tradition. In the particular field of advertising, most of the researches have been focused on generic samples of advertisements or on the advertising traditionally associated to a masculine or a feminine audience. However, few authors have analyzed gender contents in food advertising, in spite of the close relationship between gender structures and the social processes of food purchase and preparation. Thus, gender representations in food advertising broadcast in Spanish television are analyzed in this article. The main results obtained show clear gender differences. For example, there is a clear predominance of masculine voices over and a more balanced situation regarding protagonists. Besides, feminine protagonists are more frequently located indoors, portrayed as attractive women and connected to advertising claims related to beauty or to the healthy qualities of the product.

**Keywords:** Gender, advertising, food, television, content analysis.

### **1. Introduction**

Mass media have become the main source of information for human beings. Thus, they participate in socialization processes, showing a certain representation of the material, social and ideal environment and what happens in it (Martín Serrano, 2004: 40). Regarding advertising, independently from the main intention of the emitters, it transmits lifestyles and proposals about how to look, behave and consume to be successful in society (Díaz-Soloaga, 2007: 28). Advertising does not only offer products, but also models of attitudes, ways of life and images which orient and in many cases define the needs and wishes of people (Peña and Frabetti, 1990: 5). In this way, "advertising is an effective and pervasive medium of influence and persuasion, and its influence is cumulative, often subtle, and primarily unconscious" (Kilbourne, 1999: 67).

According to Erving Goffman (1979), advertising transmits, implicitly, who we should be. As for gender, the studies by Goffman himself together with the most recent ones coincide in stating that, broadly speaking, advertising tends to offer traditional and stereotyped images of men and women, relations and gender roles (Garst and Bodenhausen, 1997; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998; Furnham and Mak, 1999; Ganahl et al., 2003; Uray and Burnaz, 2003; Royo et al., 2008; Gentry and Harrison, 2010). On a methodological

basis, most of the researches analysing gender representations have opted for applying the quantitative perspective of content analysis, following the proposals of pioneering studies such as the one by McArthur and Resko (1975). In the present article, we have also applied this quantitative approach, but television spots related to food products have been taken as object of study. This is a kind of advertising that has been analyzed, especially, in relation to child audience and possible effects on food habits, but whose analysis in relation to images and gender roles is almost non-existent (Parkin, 2006; Furnham and Li, 2008; Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008).

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The analysis of mass media from a gender perspective has a long tradition (Mattelart, 1982; Pearson, 1993; Martín Serrano, 1995; Altés, 2000; Muñoz, 2001; Cunningham et al., 2004; Ross and Byerly, 2004; Carilli and Campbell, 2005; Byerly and Ross, 2006). These studies have analyzed emitters, contents and receivers, being the analysis of the media content the one which has mainly attracted the attention of researchers (Byerly and Ross, 2006).

Regarding the obtained results, Gauntlett (2008: 46-65) differentiates between the studies carried out before the 90s and those being developed over that decade and later. In the earlier ones, results show a clear presence of stereotyped images of men and women. In the 90s, these stereotypes are less explicit but still present. In this sense, Gauntlett observes that "to a certain extent, programme makers (tv) arrived at comfortable, not-particularly-offensive models of masculinity and femininity, which a majority of the public seemed to think were OK. Producers thus seemed to give up on feeling that they might need to challenge gender representations" (2008: 65).

### **2.1. Gender and television advertising**

The pioneering study by McArthur and Resko (1975) represents a model for many researchers who have applied the techniques of content analysis when considering the images advertising transmits about men and women. From this initial study until more recent ones, results usually show coincidences when pointing at the existence of gender stereotypes (Furnham and Mak, 1999; Ganahl et al., 2003; Uray and Burnaz, 2003). Following Royo et al.:

"Women have been portrayed in a few narrowly-defined roles as unemployed or as employed in traditional women's occupations such as wife, mother or homemaker (...) They have also been represented as dependent on others, at home and depicted against a background of children (...) in decorative roles in relation to the product (...) or as sex objects (...). On the other hand, men have

been portrayed as independent, intelligent, hard working, professionals, objective decision-makers (...); as interviewers, narrators, or celebrities (...) and, in other locations different from home" (2008: 381).

The most recent studies emphasize two processes that have taken place in the last decades (Robinson and Hunter, 2008): they find "evidence of a reduction in gender stereotypes but still plenty of evidence for their existence" (Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008, p. 170). In this sense, Valls and Martínez conclude that, nowadays, "the general opinion is that sexism or gender stereotyping in television advertising continues, although portrayals of women in advertising are becoming more realistic" (2007: 692).

Observed changes imply that the presence of women is increasing in television commercials (Neto et al., 2009: 1126); and that female characters are shown represented in a broader range of contexts: in working places, showing non domestic products or sharing with men domestic responsibilities (Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008: 171; Robinson and Hunter, 2008: 483). However, researches also emphasize the fact that women continue to be shown, to a larger degree, in domestic contexts (Valls and Martínez, 2007: 694-697; Bresnahan et al., 2001); as housewives, mothers or performing stereotyped jobs (Royo et al., 2008: 381; Coltrane and Messineo, 2000); and as young adults, as opposed to a greater diversity of "depictions of male characters across the life span" (Stern and Mastro, 2004: 216). Similarly, thinness usually seems to be a criterion of beauty and femininity (Furnham and Imadzu, 2002; Santiso, 2001); female presence continues to be lower than male presence, especially in the form of narrators and voices over (Valls and Martínez, 2007; Uray and Burnaz, 2003; Nassif and Gunter, 2008; Furnham and Farragher, 2001); and men appear, more frequently, as authorized or expert people (Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008: 172).

In this respect, it must be taken into account that the main aim of advertising is to persuade about the purchase of a product or service. To get this, publicists attempt to show the advertised products in relation to cultural values which the spectator feels comfortable about. That is to say, to be able to reach the greatest number of people and convince about the purchase of a product, advertising uses the mostly spread images which are also the most retrograde and resistant to change (Santiso, 2001: 46).

## **2.2. Gender in food advertisements**

Some products have been traditionally linked to a masculine or a feminine audience. It is precisely this kind of advertising the one which has centered the attention of most of the studies in the analysis of gender roles and stereotypes (Parkin, 2006:1). With regards to food advertisements, they are usually considered "not clearly gender related" (Royo et al, 2008: 388) and have not been stated as specific aim of research in the analysis of gender representations. Food advertising has been analyzed, especially, in reference to the transmission of food habits, particularly in relation to child audiences (Dixon et al., 2007; Buijzen et al.,

2008; Sixsmith and Furham, 2009). Therefore, despite the fact that in all societies food and the processes connected to it (purchase, planning, preparation, etc.) are strongly marked by gender definitions, representations of men and women in food spots have seldom been analyzed.

In our research, the studies by Parkin (2006); Furham and Li (2008) and Aronovsky and Furnham (2008) have been taken as references. Parkin develops, in her book, a historical depiction of food advertising in the United States. She emphasizes the persistence of traditional gender roles in this type of advertising in spite of the social changes that have occurred during the last decades in gender relations. In this sense, "it is clear that the industry believed they stood to gain from promoting a traditional gender role paradigm". This way, "to reach women, food advertisers moved beyond trumpeting the merits of particular products and suggested that their products would help a woman fulfill her gender roles" (2006: 5-6).

Nevertheless, the premises Parkin comes to are not so clearly coherent with the other two empirical studies, based on the application of quantitative techniques of content analysis (Furnham and Li, 2008; Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008). In fact, these studies, which have been carried out in different geographical contexts, come to contradictory conclusions. Furnham and Li (2008), in their research on food advertising in Hong Kong, do not observe significant gender differences either as to the quantitative presence of men and women, or to age distribution, credibility, location or use of advertising claims. Specifically, they conclude that "the results confirm there were no significant differences between gender in terms of central figures in the advertisement and this is true across all samples analyzed" (Furnham and Li, 2008: 305).

By using a similar methodology, but applied to the British case, Aronovsky and Furnham (2008) obtained completely opposite conclusions: with significant differences that indicate a major feminine presence; women are much more frequently represented as buyers or users, whereas men are, to a greater extent, represented as authority; it is more frequent that women play dependent roles (wives, mothers); feminine characters are shown with greater probability at "home/store setting while males were more likely than females to be portrayed in leisure setting". Finally, women "were more frequently depicted as younger than males" (Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008: 181-182).

### **3. Methodological approach**

Following Furnham and Li (2008) and Aronovsky and Furnham (2008) and similarly to most of the empirical research which has been carried out in other advertising sectors, we have also applied quantitative techniques of content analysis (Berelson, 1952). To be specific, a total of 407 advertisements have been codified with the aim of determining the characteristics associated to the masculine and feminine figures

that are shown in them. This way, we attempt to contrast our results with previous investigations, whether in reference to the food sector or to other advertising sectors.

### 3.1. Corpus study

Specifically, to carry out this investigation, within the food sector, and following the classification Infoadex<sup>1</sup> uses, the adverts corresponding to the 10 subcategories with the greatest number of television advertising insertions during the year 2006 have been selected. This way, we have analyzed advertisements related to: 1) Frozen and refrigerated food; 2) Cereals; 3) Chocolates; 4) Cocoa products; 5) Biscuits; 6) Bakery and pastry; 7) Yoghourt and fresh desserts; 8) Dairy products; 9) Meat and meat products 10) Sweets and treats.

For each of these categories, all the advertisements have been analyzed: a total of 407 pieces of advertising. Therefore, it has been adopted as a corpus study not just a sample but the total population of spots of the ten selected food categories. All of them are television advertisements broadcast in 2006 on national public television channels (TVE 1 and La 2) and also private channels but with public-access broadcast (Tele5, Antena3, Cuatro and La Sexta)<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.2. Coding

The results shown in this article are part of a broader investigation<sup>3</sup>. Specifically, from the 220 variables that constitute the general study, we have selected those which let some gender analysis be carried out; i.e., those that, taking as a unit of analysis the spot, let us establish some association between a series of features and the gender of voices over and protagonists. The selected variables refer to the following characteristics: target audience, age represented by voices over and protagonists, aesthetic features, settings and advertising claims being used. Obviously, some of these variables can only be applied to the spots taking into account the protagonists, while others are also applicable to the voices over.

Some clarifications must be done around the concept of gender employed in this article. As Gender Studies have established, we must define gender as a social construction (Sau, 2000: 133-138). In fact this is the feature that justifies the study of gender contents in mass media, which are considered a powerful agent of socialization. As a socially constructed reality gender is not a dichotomous variable and it is not possible to talk about one real masculinity or femininity. In this sense, many authors prefer to speak about a continuum (Talbot, 1998) avoiding the reference of only two clearly differentiated categories: masculine

<sup>1</sup> Accessible by previous database contracting at <http://www.infoadex.es/> [consulted on April 3, 2011]

<sup>2</sup> The access to the spots has been made through the database Infoadex. Its acquisition was possible thanks to the research project "Social values in advertising spots broadcast during the year 2006" (GV06/090), funded by the Generalitat Valenciana and directed by professor Claudia Rausell at the University of Alicante.

<sup>3</sup> Exactly, the results are part of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Analysis of the form and content of television food advertisements targeted at children*, by the researcher Cristina González-Díaz (dissertation defended at the University of Alicante, September 15th, 2011).

and feminine. In spite of recognizing this complexity, for the present analysis we have indeed simplified the gender variable and reduced it to these two categories, which enable the classification of characters appearing in the spots as masculine or feminine. In order to carry out this classification we have taken into account the performance of both sexual traits and traditional gender definitions and attributions.

Unquestionably, data encoding is one of the most important stages in the research since a correct registration determine the quality of the results. To reduce the chances of error in this process a detailed coding manual was drawn up. Finally, a mask in the SPSS program was designed, so it could be used in the viewing and coding of the spots. The selected advertisements were analyzed by both authors applying the variables that let a gender analysis be performed. The level of agreement between the encoders was of 92 %; disagreements were worked out through discussion and consensus (Gentry and Harrison, 2010: 84).

#### 4. Results and Analysis

Some researches, in particular those who have studied the image of men and women in food spots (Furnham and Li, 2008; Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008), analyze voices over and protagonists together as main characters. However, in our research, we have opted for considering in a separate way the characteristics associated to the protagonists from the characteristics associated to the voices over, attempting, whenever possible, the comparison between both of them. Specifically, we have analyzed the main voice over in each spot and up to five protagonists per advertisement. In this sense, 88% of the advertisements show, at least, one voice over, whereas in 93% there is at least one protagonist.

It can be observed in Table 1 how voices over and protagonists are distributed according to gender. This way, whereas the protagonists' presence is almost balanced, the imbalance is obvious in the case of the voices over, which are mainly masculine (71% compared to 29% of feminine voices over). That is to say, while the physical presence of feminine characters is outstanding, food spots seem to opt, predominantly, for masculine voices when offering their products.

Table 1. Voices over and protagonists according to gender

Base: total of voices over or protagonists.

		VOICES OVER	PROTAGONISTS
Gender	Feminine	29 %	53 %
	Masculine	71 %	47%
Total		100 %	100 %

We therefore agree with previous empirical studies which identify the greatest inequality as for the presence of men and women in that which takes the form of narrators or voices over (Rausell et al., 2008; Valls and Martínez, 2007; Uray and Burnaz, 2003; Nassif and Gunter, 2008; Furnham and Farragher, 2001; Whipple and McManamon, 2002). It is more difficult to compare the results obtained with the studies of Furnham and Li (2008) and Aronovsky and Furnham (2008), based on food spots, since they do not differentiate between voices over and advertising players. This may be the reason why their results differ from the ones obtained in the present research, since these authors either do not find any quantitative gender differences or, in the study carried out in Great Britain, the differences show a higher feminine presence.

According to preceding studies, it is more frequent in advertising the use of masculine voices due to the connotation of credibility and authority men have in order to show the benefits of a product (Whipple and McManamon, 2002: 80; Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008: 172). Nevertheless, following Whipple and McManamon (2002: 81), there are no researches that demonstrate the real effectiveness of the masculine voice in contrast with the feminine voice in television advertising; hence, the supremacy of the first one over the second one is based on suppositions which do not follow any scientific criteria. In this respect, more information can be contributed if, when examining the presence of masculine and feminine characters, the target audience is considered. As can be seen in Table 2, in all the cases, voices over are predominantly masculine. However, this predominance is especially high in the case of advertising targeted to children (where 92,6 % of the voices over are masculine voices), whereas when advertising is targeted to adults, there is an increase in the presence of feminine voices over (representing 39,3 % of the voices over targeted to this audience). In other words, adults are thought to be persuaded, to a greater extent, by feminine voices, while when addressing to a child audience the choice is, unanimously, of masculine voices. The relationship between the gender of voices over and the target audience can be described as statistically significant according to associated chi-square values.

Regarding the presence of protagonists, the distribution shows a greater imbalance than when the target audience was not considered. Thus, if the spots are aimed at children, there is a greater presence of masculine protagonists (71% of the total characters). However, when the spot is addressed to adults, the protagonists are mostly feminine (63,5 %). That is to say, both masculine voices over and protagonists appear more frequently when the advertising is targeted to a child audience. On the other hand, when the advertising is targeted to an adult audience, protagonists are mainly women and, though masculine voices continue to be dominant, the presence of feminine voices is greater than in the case of other audiences. This way, it can be stated that it is not only credibility and authority what masculine voices and advertising

players seem to contribute but, particularly, they are observed as more capable of connecting with a child audience, at least in the case of food advertising.

Table 2. Voices over and protagonists according to gender and target audience

		Target audience		
		Children	Adults	Both age groups
Voices over <sup>4</sup>	Feminine	7,4 %	39,3 %	28,6 %
	Masculine	92,6 %	60,7 %	71,4 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
Protagonists <sup>5</sup>	Feminine	29,0 %	63,5 %	43,8 %
	Masculine	71,0 %	36,5 %	56,2 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %

Besides the quantitative presence of voices and protagonists of one gender or another, several characteristics can be analyzed as, for example, the relationship with different advertising claims. In this sense, independently of the gender of the characters, the use of four categories of claims stands out: the healthy benefits of the product (present in 36,1 % of the spots analyzed); its capacity to help keeping slim (21,1 % of the spots); its relation to some promotions or discounts (19,4 %); and its presentation as something new or exclusive (8,1 %). This way, the high presence of the first two categories of advertising ploys seem to follow Furnham and Li (2008: 298), who stated that, since food advertising is particularly targeted to women (main responsible for the food purchase and preparation), it attempts to call on what have traditionally been considered feminine worries, such as health and personal image.

Concerning the association between the gender of voices over and protagonists and the claims used, results can be checked in Table 3. So, even if the differences according to gender are minimal when offering the product or some of its elements as new or exclusive, these are clear with respect to the other three advertising claims most frequently used. This way, feminine characters appear to a greater extent associated with the healthy nature of the product (36,3 % of the feminine voices over compared to 29,0 % of the masculine ones; and 35,1 % of the feminine protagonists as opposed to 25,4 % of the masculine ones) and, especially, with the help the product may mean when keeping a slender body (18,6 % of the feminine voices over and 10,1 % of the feminine protagonists in contrast with 2,0 % of the masculine voices over and 2,5 % of masculine protagonists).

<sup>4</sup> Data come from the contingency table between "target audience" and "gender of the main voice over". Chi-square: 35.666; P: 0.001 (significant).

<sup>5</sup> Data come from the contingency table for multiple response variables between "target audience" and "gender of the protagonist", considering up to 5 protagonists per advertisement. Percentages are based on the total number of protagonists for each category of target audience.



Table 3. Claims according to the gender of voices over and protagonists

		Voices over <sup>6</sup>		Protagonists <sup>7</sup>	
		Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine
Advertising claims	Keep in shape	18,6%	2,0%	10,1%	2,5%
	Healthy, nutritional	36,3%	29,0%	35,1%	25,4%
	Newness, exclusivity	30,4%	27,8%	26,2%	23,4%
	Discounts	4,9%	23,9%	14,7%	27,7%
	Entertainment	0,0%	2,7%	3,7%	8,6%
	Others	9,8%	14,5%	10,3%	12,3%
	<b>Total</b>	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

On the other hand, differences are also quite clear regarding the association of the product with promotions and discounts (table 3), which is more frequent between masculine characters: 23,9 % of the masculine voices over in contrast with only 4,9 % of the feminine ones, and 27,7 % of the masculine protagonists versus 14,7 % of the feminine protagonists. Finally, though with much lower numbers, the percentage of masculine characters related to entertainment as a way of selling a product is also greater, especially in reference to the protagonists, who reached 8,6 % compared to 3,7 % of the feminine protagonists.

As well as the types of advertising claims used, other characteristics represented by the masculine and feminine characters have also been analyzed. To be precise, age has been codified both for voices and for protagonists, whereas the physical presence of the protagonists let us include other variables such as their aesthetic appearance and the settings where they are located. Thus, in Table 4 results corresponding to the groups of age represented by the characters are shown. Regarding the voices over, it can be noticed that these are, almost exclusively, adult. Children voices are practically non-existent: there are no children masculine voices and they only mean 9,8 % of the feminine voices.

<sup>6</sup> Data come from the contingency table between "advertising claim" and "gender of the main voice over". Chi-square: 49.785; P: 0,001 (significant).

<sup>7</sup> Data come from the contingency table for multiple response variables between "advertising claim" and "gender of the protagonist", considering up to 5 protagonists per advertisement. Percentages are based on the total number of protagonists differentiated by gender.

Table 4. Age represented by voices over and protagonists according to gender

		Voices over <sup>8</sup>	
		Masculine	Feminine
Age	Minors	0 %	9,4 %
	Adults	100 %	90,6 %
	Total	100 %	100 %
		Protagonists <sup>9</sup>	
		Masculine	Feminine
Age	Minors	57,7 %	31,9 %
	Youngster and young adults	32,0 %	52,6 %
	Adults	5,5 %	12,4 %
	Third Age	1,8 %	1,7 %
	Not specified	3,0 %	1,4 %
	Total	100 %	100 %

The situation changes when considering the protagonists, whose physical presence allows a major level of detail when analyzing the age group represented. In particular, most of the protagonists belong to either two categories: minors or young people. However, gender differences are quite clear. While 57,7 % of the masculine protagonists and 31,9 % of the feminine protagonists are minors, the percentages are reversed in the case of young people, category in which can be included 32 % of the masculine protagonists and 52,6 % of the feminine ones. The presence of adult protagonists is much lower and the characters that can be placed in the third age group are practically non-existent. These results agree with previous studies that show a greater tendency to represent, in advertising, women as young adults (Stern and Mastro, 2004: 216; Larson, 2001; Fullerton and Kendrick, 2000). However, the diversity of age groups is limited both for masculine and feminine protagonists, who are mostly characterized as young people or as minors, with a minimal presence of other age groups.

Continuing with the analysis, table 5 show the physical appearance of masculine and feminine protagonists. Exactly, characters have been classified under three possible categories: "ugly", "handsome" and "normal"<sup>10</sup>. The presence of "ugly" characters is minimal, although slightly higher in the case of the masculine protagonists. The greatest percentages are represented by what we considered as "normal"

<sup>8</sup> Data come from the contingency table between "age" and "gender" of the main voice over. Chi-square: 10.292; P: 0,001 (significant).

<sup>9</sup> Data come from the contingency table for multiple response variables between "age" and "gender" of the protagonists, considering up to 5 protagonists per advertisement. Percentages are based on the total number of protagonists differentiated by gender.

<sup>10</sup> We have classified as "ugly" all those characters that base their presence in the spot on the explicit representation of features alien to dominant beauty standards. "Handsome" are those protagonists that become the main element of the advertisement by the exposure of faces and bodies linked to the dominant beauty canons, mainly in the fashion world. Remaining characters, i.e. those that are not clearly classifiable as "ugly" or "handsome", have been coded as "normal".

characters; to be precise, 52 % both for masculine and feminine protagonists. These results seem to show, in the particular case of food advertising, the preferences of the advertisers to use models who are relatively close, from the aesthetical point of view, to the future consumer. On the other hand, we also find a high presence of protagonists who can be considered "handsome". This presence is especially high in the case of female characters, as 44,3% of them can be placed in this category (for masculine protagonists, the percentage decreases to 24,9%). This way, the presence of models who border on aesthetic perfection continues to be high, especially when dealing with feminine models (in concordance with the results obtained in previous investigations following Stern and Mastro, 2004: 219).

Table 5. Protagonists according to gender and physical appearance

		Gender <sup>11</sup>	
		Feminine	Masculine
<b>Physical appearance</b>	<b>Ugly</b>	1,7 %	5,8 %
	<b>Normal</b>	52,0 %	51,8 %
	<b>Handsome</b>	44,3 %	24,9 %
	<b>Not explicit</b>	2,0 %	17,5 %
	<b>Total</b>	100 %	100 %

Finally, another feature frequently analyzed in previous studies is the setting in which the action of the characters is placed (for example, Furnham and Li, 2008 or Aronovsky and Furnham, 2008). In our case, as can be observed in Table 6, most of the characters are placed either in a domestic setting or in an outdoor one. In particular, feminine protagonists appear mostly in domestic settings (48,8 %) in comparison with masculine protagonists (35,2 %); whereas to a lesser extent they are located in outdoor settings (24,7 % of feminine protagonists in contrast with 34,5 % of the masculine protagonists). These results coincide with the ones obtained in previous investigations (Valls and Martínez, 2007; Bresnahan et al., 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Data come from the contingency table for multiple response variables between "physical appearance" and "gender" of the protagonists, considering up to 5 protagonists per advertisement. Percentages are based on the total number of protagonists differentiated by gender.

Table 6. Protagonists according to gender and setting

		Gender <sup>12</sup>	
		Feminine	Masculine
Setting	Domestic setting: kitchen	29,9%	18,8%
	Domestic setting: other settings	18,9%	16,4%
	Workplace	5,7%	6,3%
	Outdoors	24,7 %	34,5 %
	Imaginary places	4,9%	8,1%
	Others	15,9%	15,9%
	Total	100 %	100 %

As can be noticed in Table 6, when codifying, a distinction was made as to whether the action took place in the kitchen or in other domestic settings. Such differentiation show that masculine and feminine protagonists are located in similar percentages in domestic settings different from the kitchen (18,9 % of the feminine characters and 16,4 % of the masculine ones), whereas, when the setting being shown is a kitchen, the inequalities are clear. This way, 30 % of the feminine protagonists and 19 % of the masculine ones are placed in this specific context. These data seem to support the conclusions reached by other scholars who pose the question of permanency of traditional roles in advertising around the association of women as responsible for (and expert in) the care and attention of the different members of the family (Royo et al., 2008; Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Ferrés, 1996).

## 5. Conclusions

Our results show considerable differences compared with previous empirical studies on advertising in the food sector. This way, it must be remembered that, analyzing together voices over and protagonists, Furnham and Li (2008) stated a balanced quantitative presence of feminine and masculine characters, whereas Aronovsky and Furnham (2008) emphasized a higher feminine presence. Unlike these investigations, in our study voices over and protagonists were analyzed separately. This way, the results show a higher presence of masculine voices over and a distribution relatively balanced regarding the protagonists. In fact, these results follow those contributed by previous researches on general samples of television advertising, which emphasize both the increasing feminine presence in advertising (Clear et al.,

<sup>12</sup> Data come from the contingency table for multiple response variables between "setting" and "gender" of the protagonists, considering up to 5 protagonists per advertisement. Percentages are based on the total number of protagonists differentiated by gender.

2009: 1126) and the persistent masculine prominence in the case of voices over (Valls and Martínez, 2007; Uray and Burnaz, 2003; Nassif and Gunter, 2008; Furnham and Farragher, 2001).

Traditionally, the higher presence of masculine narrators in advertising has been related to supposed connotations of credibility and authority associated with the masculine voice (Whipple and McManamon, 2002: 80). However, Whipple and McManamon (2002) indicate that this belief in a greater efficiency of men's voice is not based on scientific criteria but on mere suppositions. In this respect, according to the obtained results, it really seems that, when designing an advertising message, the fact of choosing a masculine narrator is not just based on the search of credibility or confidence. So, when the advertising is oriented to a child audience, almost unanimously masculine voices over are used; however, when the target is an adult audience, the presence of feminine voices rises considerably. Similarly, taking into account the advertising claims being used, feminine voices over are associated to a greater extent to claims related to the healthy or aesthetic benefits of the product, while masculine voices keep a closer connection to promotions, discounts or entertainment as an advertising claim. That is to say, masculine voices over are especially associated to children audiences and claims not directly associated with the explanation of the benefits of the product.

On the other hand, independently of the gender of the characters, the claims that are more frequently used are those related to the healthy nature of the product and its benefits when helping the user keep in shape. In this sense, we agree with previous authors who emphasize the presence of this kind of messages in food advertisements. These messages are usually associated with apparently feminine interests and respond to the consideration of women as the main target of food advertising (Furnham and Li, 2008: 298). What is more, they are not simply claims targeted to women but also transmitted by feminine characters, since the percentages of feminine voices over and protagonists associated with health and aesthetic benefits of the product as advertising ploys are considerably greater than those related to masculine characters.

However, women not only play a major role in relation to advertising claims related to aesthetic care, but also they are clearly more attractive in comparison with masculine characters. Thus, although the presence of "normal" protagonists is high, both for masculine and for feminine figures, differences are clear concerning aesthetic beauty, being much more usual when the advertising players are feminine than when they are masculine. Most of the previous research supports this idea, making us conclude that, in the case of women, "exaggerated beauty standards are the norm in television commercials" (Stern and Mastro, 2004: 219).

As for the age represented by the protagonists, our data differ, in some aspects, from the results usually obtained in the analysis of advertising. This way, the limited variety of groups of age represented by women that some studies indicate (Stern and Mastro, 2004: 216), seems to affect equally to men, as most

of the protagonists are either young people or minors. Nevertheless, the differences according to gender are quite clear, feminine protagonists being shown much more often as young adults (this idea agrees with previous research done by Larson, 2001 or Fullerton and Kendrick, 2000) and masculine protagonists as children. The presence of elderly actors is almost non-existent, both for men and women.

Finally, the results obtained let us also speak about gender differences in relation to the setting where the action of the characters is developed. This way, and following previous studies (Valls and Martínez, 2007: 694-697; Bresnahan et al., 2001), to a greater extent, masculine protagonists appear in outdoor settings while it is more frequent that feminine players are located in domestic settings. Particularly, the percentage of feminine protagonists located in a kitchen is clearly higher. This way, the results coincide with those obtained by Aronovsky and Furnham (2008), in contrast with Furnham and Li (2008), who did not notice relevant differences in relation to this aspect.

To sum up, considering the previous studies in the particular field of food advertising, our results are positioned relatively close to the contributions by Aronovsky and Furnham (2008). In this sense, we can emphasize the existence of clear differences in gender contents this kind of advertising transmits, both as for the quantitative presence of characters and for the advertising claims being used, the aesthetic features, age or the setting in which the action takes place. Accordingly, our data also show that advertising is showing, not only by its protagonists, but also through its narrators and advertising claims, stereotyped patterns and images of men and women. Thus, although advertising has incorporated new elements in accordance with social changes, there is still a preference for the utilization of traditional features when offering the products.

## 6. References

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