

A quantitative research of consumer's attitude towards food products advertising

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Abstract

Identifying the consumers' attitude towards television/radio/press advertising is especially important, a fact which is highlighted by national and international speciality literature. The attitude of the consumer towards a television commercial influences the attitude towards the promoted product or brand. Thus, a positive attitude towards the commercial for a brand determines a positive attitude towards the respective brand and, eventually, may result in the formulation of the purchase intent. It is hard to say which aspects of advertising have the greatest influence on the formation of consumer attitudes and purchase intent formulation, but not impossible to find out. In this context, through this study, we aim at contributing to the determination of the consumers' attitude towards televised advertising aimed at promoting food products.

Keywords: *marketing research, consumer behavior, attitude, dimensions of consumer behavior, statistic survey.*

1. Introduction

The specialists agree that identifying the consumers' attitude towards television/radio/press advertising is especially important, a fact which is highlighted by national and international speciality literature.

Knowing the consumers' attitude towards the advertising phenomenon has different purposes. For example, for the purpose of understanding the effects of advertising on consumers, the specialists usually propose the research of the consumer's attitude in relation to the advertising and the persuasion process through promotional communication, this being, first of all, for the purpose of amending certain attitudes against certain brands, a desideratum that can be accomplished through promotional communication. The attitude of the consumer towards a television commercial influences the attitude towards the promoted product or brand. Thus, a positive attitude towards the commercial for a brand determines a positive attitude towards the respective brand and, eventually, may result in the formulation of the purchase intent. It is hard to say which aspects of advertising have the greatest influence on the formation of consumer attitudes and purchase intent formulation, but not impossible to find out.

In this context, through this study, we aim at contributing to the determination of the consumers' attitude towards televised advertising aimed at promoting food products.

2. The concept of attitude

Attitude is the term used when we consider the total assessment (including of oneself), performed by one consumer, of persons, objects or problems, that takes into consideration how favorable/unfavorable or how positively/negatively is the judged object considered.

Attitude is considered by some marketing specialists as representing a latent size of the consumer's behavior as being the result of certain affective and learning processes, which create the predisposition to act based on certain convictions, reuniting the influences exerted by skills, habits and reasons in a single behavioral component with a more pronounced stability in time.

Attitudes can vary in a large number of ways. We can take into consideration the attitudes based on their fundamental aspects and thus we can discriminate attitudes based on emotions, faiths or behaviors and previous experiences, or we can approach the attitudes that have an internal consistency (being significantly

associated with feelings, attributes and positive behaviors) or ambivalent attitudes (composed by a combination of positive and negative attributes) [4]. Also, from the beginning of the 90s, the idea that attitudes may develop as a byproduct of the subconscious gained momentum, as an automatic or default process, creating the notion of a default attitude, representing traces of previous unidentified experiences in the introspection process and that mediate feelings, thoughts or favorable or unfavorable actions in relation to social objects, much more strongly influenced by unconscious processing. Consequently, a dissociation shall be made within the research between explicit (or declared) attitudes and the implicit ones. Thus, constructions that are based on what respondents declare in the case of measuring vanity, stigmatized behavior and that "dark" part of the behavior, such as, for example, drug and alcohol use, can be affected by the refractory behavior of the subjects, manifested at the moment when exact statements are requested of them, due to prejudices related to social desirability [3].

Three dimensions were associated with attitude [1]:

- an *affective dimension*, representing the favorable or unfavorable disposition towards a certain social object;
- a *cognitive dimension*, respectively knowing or ignoring the object in cause;
- a *conative dimension*, namely the firm attention to act or behave in a certain way towards the attitude object.

Attitudes lead to the formation of a way of thinking based on the acceptance or rejection of an object, on the approaching or distancing from it and, also, they determine people to have a relatively constant behavior towards similar objects. These have the role of saving energy and the effort of thinking, this is why it is actually very difficult to change them. Due to the power of attitudes to determine several actions, it is not surprising that millions of Euros, dollars, pounds and yens are spent each year in the attempt to influence and change assessments done by consumers on objects, problems and persons.

Attitude change simply means that the individual assessment manner changes from one value to the next. Attitude changes can manifest as their *polarization*, which occurs when these change towards their initial trend (the favorable attitude of a person becomes even more favorable) or as their *depolarization*, which occurs when the attitude changes towards an opposite direction. As a rule, specialty literature does not include any conceptual distinction between the formation of attitudes and their change, because past researches suggest that it is more useful to look at changing attitudes as varying within a range between non-attitude and strong attitude, a scale elaborated by taking into consideration the attitude's accessibility level, in the sense of the availability of it being changed, the knowledge that the consumer has on the attitude object, along with many other factors [4].

The functional attitude theory, first proposed by Smith (1947), is considered to be among the most popular theories on attitude, being proven by the fact that most of the social psychology books and those regarding the behavior of consumers present its early development. Smith's idea was that attitudes have certain functions for the individual, a perspective which highlights its motivational roots [2]. Subsequently, psychologist Daniel Katz (1960) has continued to develop this theory, which enunciates the fact that the consumers that wait to face certain situations in the future shall begin to form certain attitudes before the event takes place.

There are four attitude functions proposed by Kats, namely [5]:

- *utilitarian function* – it is related to the basic principles of reward and punishment, according to which people develop certain attitudes towards a product, depending on the positive or negative consequences of the consumption or use of the respective product/service.
- *value-expressive function* – the consumer forms his attitude towards a product, not based on the benefits of its consumption, but based on what the adoption of the product could communicate about him, as an individual. These attitudes are relevant in the lifestyle analysis, which shows the manner in which the consumer carries out a series of activities and cultivates certain interests and opinions in order to express a specific social identity.
- *ego-defensive function* - it is fulfilled by those attitudes formed for the purposes of protecting the consumer from external threats and from internal feelings, as well.
- *knowledge function* - it is fulfilled by attitudes formed due to the need to organize, to identify a significance. It is the case of new products or of the situations in which the consumer is ambiguous.

A certain attitude can fulfill several functions, however, only one shall be dominant at all times.

3. Research methodology

The marketing research process was carried out based on the following coordinates:

↪ *Research purpose and objectives*

The research presented within this article has the purpose of determining the *attitudes of the consumers from the Bucharest area towards TV advertising aimed at promoting food products*. Such a study is not aimed at highlighting the impact of advertising on attitudes but rather to highlight the attitude that the consumers have towards advertising in general and, especially, towards TV advertising destined for promoting food products. The questions for which we seek answers are: Is advertising "a necessary evil of our society"? How do we look at the explosion of commercials around us, from television, radio and press? What things would we like to change, and how? How much do we need advertising? How invaded and influenced are we by it?

Taking into consideration the increased number of means through which advertising is done nowadays, the study is limited only to the main mass-media instrument, which is television. The main reason that supports this delimitation of research only to TV advertising is determined by the results of the studies performed by various institutes that reached the conclusion that, at present, TV advertising is predominant among the promotional techniques used in the promotion activity of an organization.

Why only food products? Because an increasing percentage of the advertising done through television is designed to promote food products. Commercials that display arguments that are, more or less, direct, regarding health, promises for maximum health, maximum shape, figure, energy for an entire day, and so forth. How influenced are we by the messages sent by advertising, how much attention we give them and what is the impact that the commercial has on us when we are making the decision to buy represent the questions, regarding televised advertising destined to promote food products, that require an answer.

The objectives adequate for the aforementioned purpose are:

- Identifying the manner in which food products advertising is perceived and appreciated by the consumers;
- Determining the extent to which advertising is present in the life of consumers;
- Establishing the degree of attention given to advertising messages;
- Determining the impact that advertising has on the consumers;
- Identifying the image of advertising as a psycho-social phenomenon for the consumers;
- Identifying the main features that a commercial or a food product should possess in order to achieve a high impact advertising promotion.

↪ *Research collectivity and sample volume*

The general collectivity that represents the object of the research is represented by the Bucharest population aged 15 and above, from which a single sample was taken. Taking into consideration the fact that advertising is a phenomenon manifested not only in the Bucharest area, for the purposes of determining the attitudes against food product advertising, it would be ideal for the research to be performed on a countrywide scale.

In order to define the population variation degree, the "Sex" and "Age" variables were the starting point. It is known from previous researches with similar topics that these variables are strongly correlated with the defined interest variables, starting from the proposed objectives.

The observation unit is represented by the natural person that is part of the researched collectivity and the survey unit is the same with the observation unit.

Because the questions from the questionnaire that was used are transposed in qualitative variables, the sample volume determination, using the relationship for qualitative variables, was considered adequate. Because the populations are not homogenous, it is possible for certain variables to have a scatter degree higher than that of auxiliary variables. For this reason, the sample volume is calculated using the maximum possible value as dispersion for qualitative variables ($p = 0,5$). The probability of guaranteeing results is 95% and a maximum admitted limit error of $\pm 5\%$. The size of the investigated collectivity, namely the persons aged 15 and above residing in Bucharest, reaches a number of 1,709,280 persons, based on the data supplied by the National Institute of Statistics [6]. Thus, the sample size shall be determined depending on the established restrictions, as follows:

$$n = \frac{1,96^2 \cdot 0,5 \cdot 0,5}{0,05^2 + \frac{1,96^2 \cdot 0,5 \cdot 0,5}{1.709.280}} = 384,074 \cong 385 \quad (1)$$

Within the research, 385 persons were interviewed based on the questionnaire, of which 21 questionnaires were eliminated, which had incomplete data and contained non-data. Therefore, we have a final sample of 364 persons. The rate of response thus reached a satisfying level of 94.5%.

↳ *Research questionnaire*

The process of elaborating a questionnaire always determines a structure that finally allows the researcher to use an original scheme when analyzing data. It is also the case of the questionnaire elaborated for collecting data for the purpose of determining the attitude of the consumers from the Bucharest area regarding the food product televised advertising.

First of all, the rule that must be observed when compiling the questionnaire is for it to be formulated so that it is possible to obtain all necessary information in order to be able to answer adequately to all the objectives and hypotheses established in subsequent stages. A questionnaire that does not represent a reflection of all the objectives, hypotheses and variables has no value for the performed research.

Another aspect taken into consideration when elaborating the questionnaire is the method established for data collection. This has an effect on the content and the manner in which questions are formulated, on their type and succession, on the questionnaire length and on its other characteristics. Thus, the information collection method used in this case was established as being the personal survey (face to face) performed in heavy-traffic public areas with street approach. Due to the reduced duration of the interview imposed by the information collection method, a small questionnaire length must be ensured, resulting in a questionnaire with 17 questions and with low complexity. These conditions imposed the use of the structured procedure for presenting the questionnaire questions. Also, in such a situation, the use of overly complex instruments for measuring phenomena must be avoided, so the scales used were part of the accessible scale category, such as: semantic differential, Likert scale and the rank order method.

Finally, as a consequence of the structured procedure and of the limited time for obtaining information, a questionnaire that contained only closed questions resulted, with a single dichotomous question, namely the one for establishing the sex of the respondents, the rest of the questions being multichotomous (with a multiple response option). Also, during the elaboration of the questions' content, the importance of correlating the content with the respondent's knowledgeability with respect to the matter at hand was also taken into consideration, thus ensuring that his response was given in full knowledge.

The language used for the elaboration of questions is simple and direct, so that it does not cause confusion and leaves no place for interpretation, being adapted to the investigated collectivity characteristics. Regarding the order of the questions, the approach by the respondent task (effort) principle was applied (The Work Approach), which requires the questions that involve a greater mental effort for an answer to be located at the center of the questionnaire.

↳ *Collecting, verifying and processing data*

The collection of information must be performed with care, in order to remove possible error sources and to reach results that do not contain major errors. Thus, in the data and information collection stage, several types of errors can occur - non-answers, inadequate sample, operator's influence, inexact answers of the respondents, etc. - which must be minimized as much as possible.

Following the questionnaire completion after interviewing the respondents, the codification operation shall be performed, followed by the elaboration of individual-variables tables for the subsequent processing and analysis.

As a rule, a prior stage of the statistical analysis and the interpretation of results is represented by establishing the sample representativeness for the population from which it was selected. This is performed starting with the auxiliary variables: "Sex" and "Age", for which the distribution parameters in the population

are known. It is a well known fact that, if the differences from the estimator's value obtained based on the survey data are significant, the sample is not representative.

The percentage of women within the entire sample was 54.1%. In order to see if there are significant differences from the value known at the level of the entire population, according to official data (53.3%), z test was used (normal volume sample) for the purposes of comparing the proportion from the sample with the one from the population. Thus, taking into account the fact that the calculated test value $z_c = 0,268$ is lower than the theoretical value $z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}} = 1,96$ established for a 95% research result guarantee probability, to which a $\alpha = 0,05$ significance level corresponds, we can conclude that the sample is representative.

Regarding the "Age" variable, the distribution form of this variable in the target population is known, due to the data supplied by INS (National Institute of Statistics), so that, for the purposes of verifying the sample representativeness, we used the χ^2 test to compare this distribution with the one from the selected sample. In our case, following the test, we obtained $\chi_c^2 = 4,7814$. The theoretical value of the test taken into consideration for a $\alpha = 0,05$ significance level and a number of $df = k - 1 = 5 - 1 = 4$ the degree of freedom is 9.49. Thus, $\chi_c^2 < \chi_{0,05;4}^2$ condition which leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis and the formulation of the conclusion, according to which the two distributions are consistent and, therefore, the sample is representative.

4. Research results

Following the study for determining *the attitudes of consumers from the Bucharest area towards TV advertising for promoting food products*, we could formulate the following conclusions, as a response to the objectives and hypotheses established in the preliminary research stage:

- The first research objective aimed at *identifying the manner in which food products advertising is perceived and appreciated by the consumers*.

Most of the respondents (70% of them) consider that the main communication means are saturated in advertising. The fact that the respondents feel choked by advertising does not reflect a positive perception.

The public receives conglomerates of advertising messages mixed with programs that they watch for personal reasons, having no control on the phenomenon. For the service that they offer by broadcasting commercials, television companies, radio stations and newspapers receive material benefits which they need for the purposes of carrying out their activity and the public accepts this as such.

With respect to the *credibility of commercials*, the results fall under the same repertory, only less positive. The respondents do not give much credit to the information supplied through these messages. This may be determined by the fact that there were significant discrepancies between what the message promises and what the product actually offers, discrepancies that affected the attitude of the consumer towards advertising. The conviction that advertising offers a "made up" reality is not necessarily due to incidence of discrepancies, knowing that, through its construction, advertising must attract attention even with the price of exaggeration.

On the other hand, regarding the *utility* of the advertising, the respondents' opinions place advertising in the low utility category (48% of the interviewees placing advertising in the useless category). Consequently, we can affirm that, regarding the role that commercials have when making the purchase decision, we can say that it is quite modest.

However, despite the slightly negative appreciations of the main advertising characteristics, the attitude of the respondents towards food product advertising is a favorable one, a fact confirmed by the 61% of those that place their attitude towards advertising for food products in the area of favorable and very favorable attitude on the semantic differential scale (see Fig.1.).

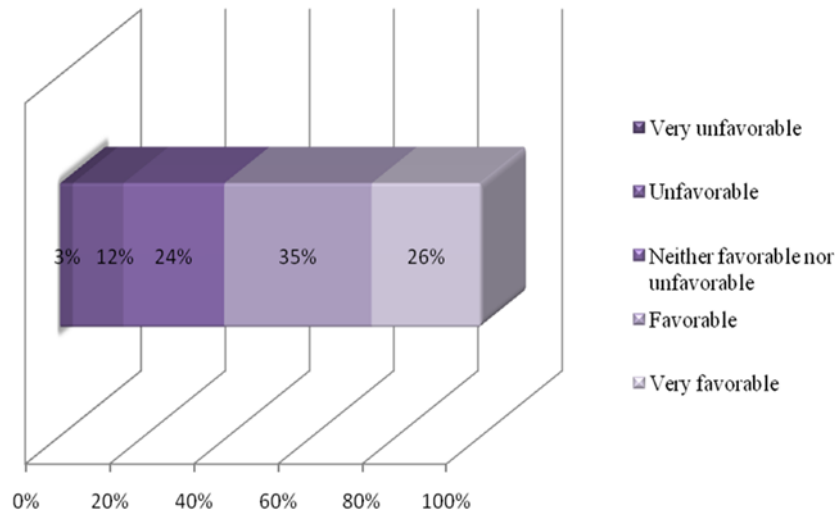


Fig. 1. Attitude towards food products advertising

This fact reveals two encouraging aspects. First of all having an attitude towards this type of commercial implies having knowledge about it, as attitudes are formed in time. Commercials used for the promotion of food products are well known to the Romanian public, being proven by the fact that consumers have an already formed attitude towards such a type of commercials. Second of all, the characteristics of food product advertising are more appreciated than advertising in general, a fact confirmed by the favorable attitude towards such a type of commercial. The commercials designed for food products are much easier to understand and are appreciated positively by the advertising loving public.

▪ The second research objective is represented by *determining the extent to which advertising exists in the life of consumers.*

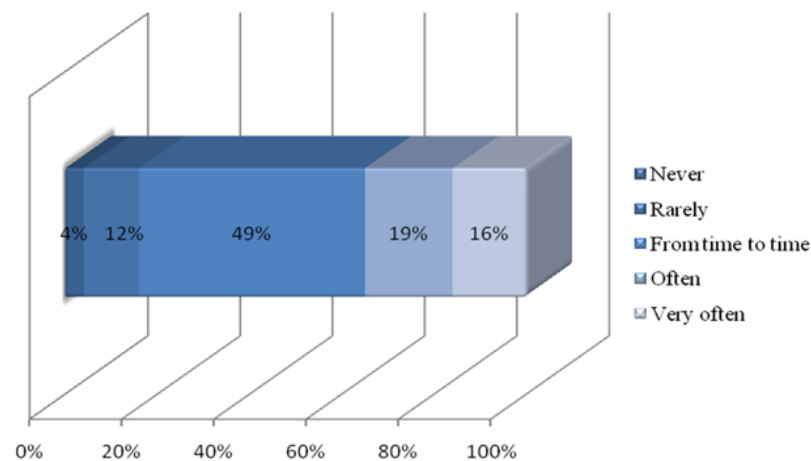


Fig. 2. The frequency with which respondents comment on the impressions about advertising

The frequency with which respondents comment on the impressions about advertising, ("from time to time", as research shows; see Fig.2.) depicts the fact that, to an extent, advertising is significant in their lives, since it is the object of a discussion. At the same time, we can conclude that advertising has the capacity to impress, one way or another, as long as the public feels the need to communicate their impressions regarding commercials.

Also, following the performed analysis, a higher tendency to comment upon the impressions on advertising with the group was registered in the case of women (44% of them comment often or very often on the impressions on advertising), in comparison with men (24% of them comment often or very often on the impressions on advertising), who do this less times than the women.

- *Establishing the degree of attention given to commercials* represented another research objective.

Based on the obtained results, we can say that the attention given to commercials is located at lower levels, a fact revealed by the share of 55% of those that place their attention towards commercials in the "very little attention" and "little attention" areas on the semantic differential scale with five stages, of the modal value, median and appreciation mean.

The research results also reveal the fact that the segment of persons aged above 55 years and those aged between 35-44 years pay more attention to commercials, in relation to the other considered segments. On the other hand, the segment of persons with an elementary level of studies tends to pay more attention to commercials, in comparison with the other segments taken in consideration based on this criterion.

In what regards the attitude towards commercial breaks, 72% of the interviewed persons claim that they try to avoid watching commercial either by leaving the television, or by changing the channel (see Fig. 3.).

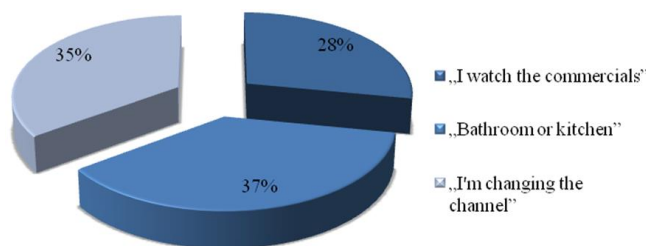


Fig. 3. Attitude towards commercial breaks

Of the 28% who stated that they watch commercial breaks, most of them are represented by women (76.5%) and by those that have an elementary level of studies (see Fig.4. and Fig.5).

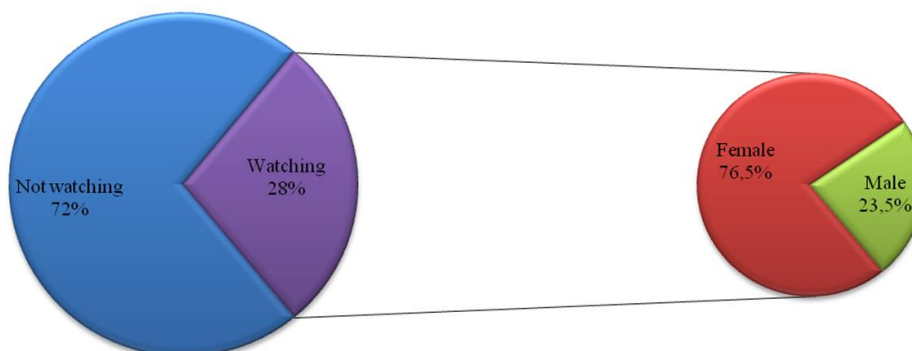


Fig. 4. The structure by gender of those who are watching commercial breaks

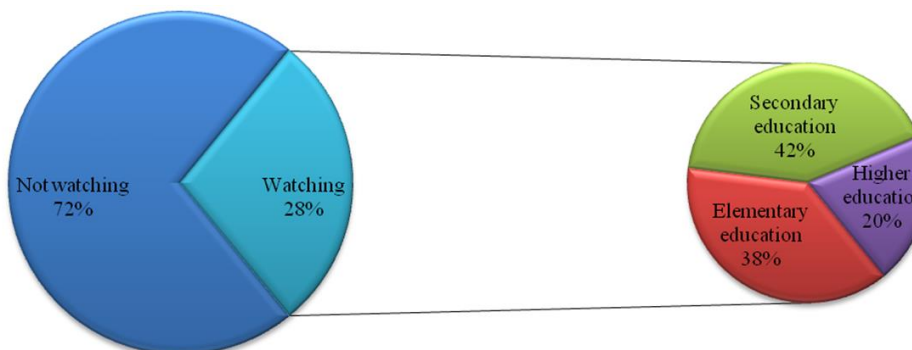


Fig. 5. The structure by education of those who are watching commercial breaks

The share of those that watch commercials the most is, also, represented by those aged between 25-34 years (29.4% of the total of the segment of those that stated that they watch commercials), followed by those aged between 45-54 years (23.6%) (see Fig.6.).

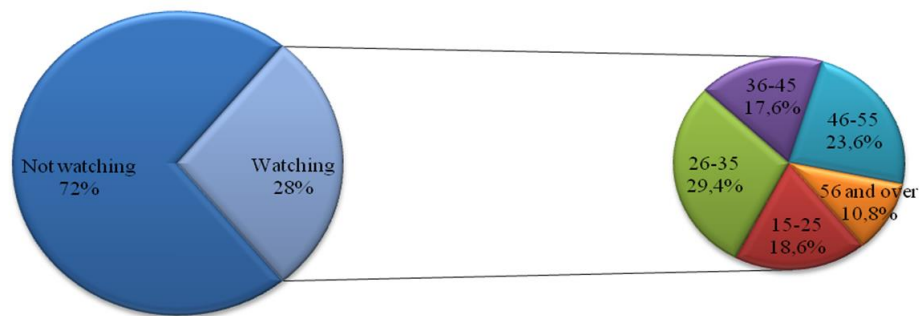


Fig. 6. The Structure by age of those who are watching commercial breaks

▪ The fourth research objective is constituted by *determining the impact that advertising has on the consumers.*

By identifying the extent to which a negatively appreciated commercial may determine one not to buy a product, we obtain information that increases the understanding of the nature of attitudes that back the respective decision up. Since we considered that this information could reveal details about the actual attitude towards advertising, we waited for the result to be useful for a pertinent interpretation on this aspect. All in all, the score that was obtained doesn't clarify. On the one hand, the results obtained following the analysis expressed by the calculated weighted arithmetic mean (with a value of -0.18), after placing the opinions on a Likert scale, and by the modal value, reveal a discrepancy and this supports the fact that commercials that are disliked do not cause the product to be rejected. On the other hand, a part of the results obtained in this study determines us to formulate only a reserved opinion in what regards the receptivity towards the advertising phenomenon, the opinion average not being relevant to this end.

• Through the following objective, *the identification of the image of advertising among consumers, as a psycho-social phenomenon* was pursued.

75% of the public considers it is, more or less, bothered by the advertising invasion broadcast by television. This brings into question a sensitivity aspect existing in TV advertising - interrupting the program with commercial breaks. This causes discontent to the 40% of those questioned, that declare that they feel very bothered by these interruptions (see Fig.7.).

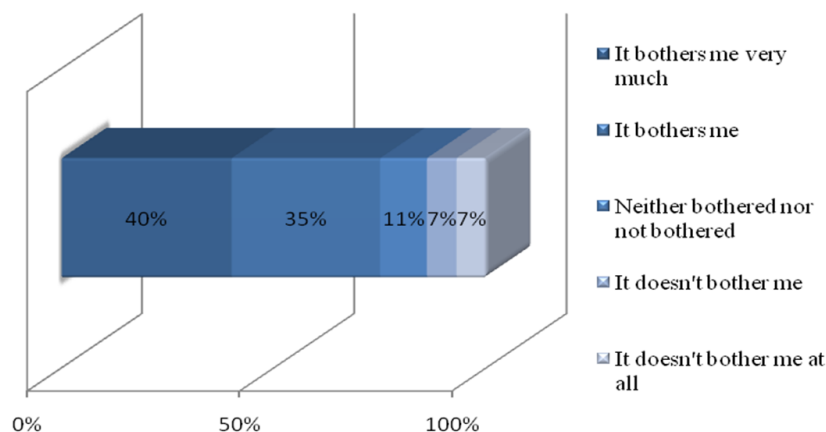


Fig. 7. Attitude towards commercial breaks

From another angle, the obtained results show that the public considers that advertising influences us in ways of which we are not aware and that there is no correlation between what is promised through it and what is actually offered. However, on the other hand, there is a relatively neutral general attitude towards the

introduction of restrictions in this domain. Adding, by contrast, the negative appreciations on the credibility and loyalty of advertising which, logically, would have determined the approval of certain possible restrictions, we are faced with a paradox. The natural question that we ask ourselves is why did the interviewees that said they were unsatisfied or bothered by the "advertising invasion" not create an opinion flow favorable for the introduction of restrictions for advertising? Which is the cause that could explain this disparity? Since we limited the research area only to aspects related to attitudes towards advertising, the results prove that the restrictions are not the ones that would improve the attitude towards advertising, but other mechanisms related to the advertising image among the consumers.

▪ The last objective of the study *involves identifying the main features that a commercial or a food product should possess in order to achieve a high impact advertising promotion*. First of all, the obtained results determine us to say that commercials that promote brands with a positive image and with tradition are more attractive in comparison with the rest of the commercials, in the opinion of the respondents (see Fig.8.).

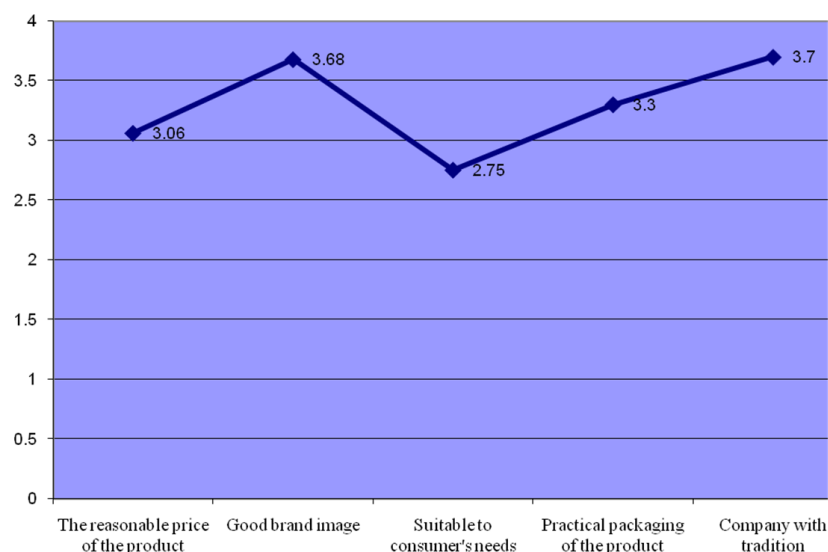


Fig. 8. Average scores that show the respondents' appreciation towards food products advertising that emphasize the attributes mentioned

Also, consumers consider that the commercials that would be the most attractive to them are those which promote healthy products, products having the best price and delicious products.

However, in what regards the characteristics of commercials with a positive effect on consumers, the results obtained at the level of the investigated sample place "relaxing" commercials on the first rank. The results also reveal the fact that respondents pay more attention to observing ethics and social morality in advertising. Common sense is an attribute that gives an image of trust on the marketed product/brand, its violation causing severe deformations, even irretrievable, of the image.

The care for the commercial to be easily memorized belongs more to the advertising creator than to its auditor. Advertising is not an objective presentation of reality, but the product of a creation process, therefore it is an intentionally subjective representation. Even though people do not want to be lied to, they are aware of the impossibility to keep a correspondence between reality-commercial.

Among the characteristics of commercials that are considered negative by the respondents, lying commercials are on the first place, this attribute being clearly detached from the others, the results reflecting a majority agreement on the fact that this practice is condemnable.

Entertainment, a good mood and the pleasure arising from following a commercial are sought by the public and it is obvious that it manifests a negative attitude towards "insipid" commercials, this experience of viewing/hearing having an important impact on its attitude system. Aggressive commercials are not liked because they invade the mental intimacy of the consumer, intimidating him and increasing his sense of insecurity.

5. Conclusions

The study which is the object of this article was organized, starting from the formulation of objectives and hypotheses of the research until the conception and structuring of the questions from the questionnaire, so that the operator can tell not only how advertising is regarded, but how it should be performed so that the public not only does not avoid it, but it also views it and, eventually, acts accordingly, respectively takes an interest in the products that these commercials try to promote.

Summarizing the aforementioned findings, we could conclude that advertising is still regarded with reluctance and skepticism in Romania, it is attributed with a limited utility and it is usually regarded as annoying. However, on the other hand, with respect to the food product advertising, the situation is slightly different, in the positive sense of the word, but, due to the fact that the interest and acceptability of the public are at the same level, because of homogenization, with the commercials for other types of products, the reaction of the viewer will always be: Commercials again?

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