

Overexposure and hypersexualization to increase sales: social perceptions and attitudes about tweens in commercial communications

Sobreexposición e hipersexualización para vender más:
percepciones y actitudes sociales sobre las preadolescentes en
comunicaciones comerciales

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RESUMEN

[ES] Introducción. Los preadolescentes siguen a *influencers* que utilizan la exhibición pública de su imagen corporal como forma de venta. Los menores pueden imitar esos patrones en sus procesos de identidad y socialización. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las percepciones de la sociedad española sobre las preadolescentes (niñas adolescentes menores de 13 años) y sus actitudes con respecto a su representación en la publicidad y en las comunicaciones comerciales para verificar si esa representación las perjudica y las hace más vulnerables en la sociedad. **Metodología.** Se ha realizado una encuesta telefónica a 346 hogares en toda España con representantes entre 18 y 65 años. **Resultados.** En 8 de cada 10 hogares se percibe que las preadolescentes sobreexponen fácilmente su imagen (78,7 %), dan mayor valor a su aspecto físico que a otros aspectos (78,8 %), y asumen patrones adultos de comportamiento (77,7 %). Respecto a su representación en comunicaciones comerciales, se percibe que la publicidad muestra una imagen de ellas mucho mayor de lo que son (86,4 %), idealizada (84,8 %) e hipersexualizada con el objetivo de vender más (83,1 %), y que los estilismos no son acordes con la edad de las preadolescentes (73,7 %). **Conclusiones.** Existe una percepción social de vulneración de la imagen de las preadolescentes, que puede explicarse y predecirse en función del sexo y edad de los individuos y de sus actitudes hacia la representación adultizada, hipersexualizada e idealizada y hacia la aceptación generalizada de estas imágenes de las menores en las comunicaciones comerciales. Para fomentar una mayor inclusión social se requiere la contribución responsable de los *influencers* y la actitud crítica de los menores y los padres hacia las imágenes que se convierten en tendencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: imagen corporal; preadolescentes; comunicaciones comerciales; percepción social; cosificación; vulnerabilidad; alfabetización digital.

ABSTRACT

[EN] Introduction. Pre-adolescents access influencers who use the public display of their body image as a form of sale. Tweens can imitate these patterns in their identity and socialization processes. The aim of this paper is to analyze the perceptions of Spanish society about pre-adolescents (adolescent girls under 13 years of age) and their attitudes regarding their representation in advertising and commercial communications to verify if this representation harms them and makes them more vulnerable in society. **Methodology.** A telephone survey has been carried out in 346 households throughout Spain with representatives between 18 and 65 years of age. **Results.** In 8 out of 10 households, it is perceived that pre-adolescents easily overexpose their image (78.7 %), give greater value to their physical appearance than to other aspects (78.8 %), and assume adult patterns of behavior (77.7 %). Regarding their representation in commercial communications, advertising is said to show an image of them much older than they are (86.4 %), idealized (84.8 %) and hypersexualized with the aim of selling more (83.1 %), and that the styles are not in accordance with the age of the preadolescents (73.7 %). **Conclusions.** There is a social perception of violation of the image of preadolescents, which can be explained and predicted according to the sex and age of the individuals and their attitudes towards adult, hypersexualized and idealized representation and towards the generalized acceptance of these images of minors in commercial communications. To foster greater social inclusion, the responsible contribution of influencers and the critical attitude of minors and parents towards the images that become a trend are required.

KEYWORDS: body image; tweens; commercial communications; social perception; objectification; vulnerability; digital media literacy.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

In Spain, 91.5% of people between 10 and 15 years old use the Internet (Sanjuán, 2020). Minors between 6- and 13-years old use it an average of five hours a day during the week and seven hours on the weekend (Jiménez-Morales et al., 2020). During that time, the entertainment benchmarks of youth digital culture are configured. Although some studies indicate that opinion leaders do not influence the field of values (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2018), in Spain, a study has concluded that how 50 influencers position products in the fashion market in social networks, generates in the collective imagination a tendency to normalize the display of personal content as a form of sale and is especially harmful to minors, who do not make any kind of responsible decision about their public display (Torres-Romay and García- Miron, 2019).

In the process of identity construction and socialization, tweens -age range between 9 and 13 years old- are guided by the protagonists of platforms such as YouTube or Facebook (Osuna-Acedo et al., 2018). A survey in the United Kingdom of 1,900 girls and young women concludes that 37% of girls say they compare themselves to celebrities that appear on social networks such as Twitter, Snapchat, and reality shows most of the time and do not differentiate them from reality (Guirlguiding, 2018). Due to their ability to prescribe recommendations in marketing, adolescent boys follow gamers who use Twitch (Telemadrid, 2021) and adolescent girls follow fashion lifestyle bloggers on Instagram (Padilla Castillo and Oliver González, 2018). Minors express themselves in these spaces mostly through images and “to become influencers they can share excessive personal information” (Internet Segura for Kids, 2019).

In the academic report that Unilever (2017) published to measure the impact of pressure on body self-esteem of tweens around the world, it was concluded that 7 out of 10 girls between 11- and 14-years old think that media images are digitally retouched, that they place too much importance on beauty as a source of happiness, and that they don't feel good about the way they appear. As a consequence, the minors stop seeing their friends, put their health at risk, and are not assertive in expressing their opinion. However, when they spend time doing things that make them happy, they feel more confident, beautiful, and less impressionable, even if they appear different from the images that appear in the

The key to the use of social networks is, therefore, the difficulty of controlling what is seen since the effect of some dangerous content on platforms such as Tik Tok shows that “digital is much more direct and simpler for those who take advantage of these apps with other purposes” (Pastor, 2020).

This research responds to a social concern of Spanish families that prompted a non-law proposal approved by the Congress of Deputies: 78.4% of them think that a sexualized image of minors is projected on the Internet (The Family Watch, 2018). The Observatory of the Image of Women (2020) has received 140 complaints and has carried out 20 previous legislative actions at the national, European, and international levels between 2010 and 2020 against the creativities of adult or traditionally children’s fashion brands, magazines, malls, fairs, and outlets. This document summarizes the trajectory of actions to eliminate cultural practices that harm girls and to encourage the Government, media, and educational institutions to project a balanced image of girls.

The authors Melendro et al. (2016) refer to vulnerability in the use of ICT by adolescents, but what is meant by vulnerability regarding this type of image of tweens? Are children vulnerable in the world of commercial communications as Spotwood and Nairn suggest for the consumption scenario (2016)? Does it affect the starting point of the subject in the interaction, as concluded by Cáceres Zapatero et al. (2013) regarding any communication? Is Spanish society critical of these types of images, and could literacy be one of the solutions to this problem, as Travieso and Planella (2008) point out?

1.1. Violation of the image of minors in communication

A priority of the European growth strategy is the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, which is sometimes weakened by some practices developed in the information society. Vulnerability applies to “individuals and groups susceptible to harm in their access and exposure to the media and services of the information society” (Fuente Cobo, 2017, p. 9); In this sense, the concept of social exclusion is extended to the new deficiencies that imply that the individual who suffers from them is, in one way or another, limited in their social rights. A European Parliament report (2012) specifically called for combating the negative impact of content that sexualizes girls on their own psychological development, not only by collecting the necessary data, promoting good practices, and organizing information campaigns but also by providing financing support for actions of the Member States.

In the context of minors, vulnerability translates into child violence, understood as “any action, omission, or negligent treatment that deprives minors of their rights and well-being, that threatens or interferes with their orderly physical, mental, or social development, regardless of its form and means of commission, including that carried out through information and communication technologies, especially digital violence” (Congress of Deputies of Spain, 2021, p.11). Sexuality experienced outside its stage of development is considered “a form of violence against girls that reduces their life expectancies and deprives them of living childhood fully”, concluded a report on the occasion of the Day of the Girl of the Observatory of the Image of Women (2020).

The regulations in Spain protect any action in the interest of the minor, understanding that their parents ensure both the right to privacy and access to information appropriate to their age. The Law promotes awareness campaigns “on the risks arising from the inappropriate use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) that may cause phenomena of sexual violence against children and adolescents such as cyberbullying, grooming, gender-based cyber-violence, or sexting, as well as the access and consumption of pornography in the underage population”, according to Agustina (2010, p. 29). The author understands the need to “protect the deficient sexual self-determination of minors”, who are denied sexual freedom at a certain age -in Spain, below 13 years old- “for reasons related to their development and well-being” (p. 4).

However, there are limits to that protection. The regulation and self-regulation in Spain on children as creators of Internet advertising due to the high concentration of influencers, “is not necessarily interpreted as their initiative or spontaneous act” (Vizcaíno-Laorga et al., 2019, p. 2). In particular, adolescents who legally consent to be exposed to sexually suggestive images -as in the case of sexting- are considered a vulnerable group to risk behaviors derived from such exposure, due to their limited self-regulation ability, high susceptibility to peer pressure, addiction to technology, and growing sexual curiosity (Gassó et al., 2019). The regulation of sexualization has also been reduced on Instagram because the algorithms only capture the obvious manifestations of sexualization by pixels, which is why Díaz Altozano et al. (2021) suggest detecting other hashtags that describe other sexualizations with semantic intelligence” besides expanding this research to other social networks, sharing the results with the Security Forces and Bodies, monitoring their use by parents, and training in educational environments.

All awareness initiatives are especially important concerning minors because “they are more vulnerable consumers as they give greater credibility to the messages and do not have a perception of risk” (iCmedia, 2021, p.28). The seriousness of adultizing the child-juvenile body lies in the fact that it addresses and represents minors “at the beginning of child body self-awareness to implant body references related to their textile products” (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2017, p. 968). One more sample that points to the harm to minors from the extension of hyper-sexualization messages is the studies of visual narratives. These research works conclude that even feminist icons with sexual traits leave messages of empowerment for adult women in the background (Pérez Virtus and Larrondo Ureta, 2019). Children and adolescents, as subjects of rights, perceive that their rights to participate and intervene in decision-making regarding their well-being have been violated (León Becerra and Falcón Pinto, 2016).

Faced with this violation, the need has arisen to develop critical thinking in adolescents regarding the content they receive in ICT, consisting of working on their own perception and self-esteem about the body, as well as their own and others’ preferences (Sanjuan, 2020). For parents and educators to encourage a critical attitude toward unhealthy trends in minors such as sexual misinformation (Sanjuan, 2020), the Dove Foundation (n.d.) has published some guides that facilitate girls’ body confidence. In response to the unrealistic appearance of girls and women by the media, who send some 5,000 advertising messages a day to young people, topics of dialogue and group dynamics are worked on. The Dove Foundation makes available numerous age-specific resources (ages 7-10, 11, and up) to challenge media examples of the image-perfect myth. Supported by readings, reference websites, and research, glossaries, discussion questions, action checklists, challenges, advice, activities, and games are proposed.

Telephone companies in Spain have also launched campaigns on the responsible use of the Internet, to avoid the consequences of content where intimacy, privacy, and respect for the image are threatened. This is the case of Movistar, which used the video “Love story” (Ads of Brands, 2017) within the program “Elegí Cuidarte”. For its part, Orange (2020) together with the Ana Foundation and Internet Segura for Kids has created the website #for a *uso love* of technology to offer families talks with teenagers and advice on safe screen time by age.

1.2. Representation of pre-adolescents in commercial and advertising communications

Cappello and Rizzuto (2020) raise the complex and multidimensional origin of social problems such as the early sexualization of childhood and conclude that they are neither due exclusively to the media nor are they solved exclusively by education. Some authors understand that the sexualization present in the visual representation of girls and the abuses produced by sexting are consequences assumed in a context of moral and media panic about conduct that is inappropriate for the age of minors. These authors disagree with regulating sexualization as a social problem among young people treated as

minors (Duschinsky, 2013). The same girls could choose these types of images to develop their sexual agency and this would enable them to resist self-objectification (Hawkes and Dune, 2013; Grower and Ward, 2021).

However, the sexualization of culture is a phenomenon traditionally linked to the objectification of women, a broader term used to refer to a type of media representation that discriminates against women and connects with the pressure to achieve a specific body type. and with pornography (Smith et al., 2020). Sexualized youth imagery refers to the use of photography, paintings, and other visual depictions that sexually objectify individuals who appear to be minors (Jensen, 2010).

Young people increasingly face lowering ideals of sexual attractiveness by forcing a choice between obscenity and romance (Burge, 2018). Sexualization has been identified more recently as generating stereotypes that discriminate against the infant-juvenile sector of the population in society (Espinar, 2006; Stone et al., 2015), induce self-objectification (Karsay and Matthes, 2016; Ruckel and Hill, 2016; Trekels et al., 2018) and sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies (Mascheroni et al., 2015; Daniels and Zurbriggen, 2016; Pacilli et al., 2016; Leigh and Shaughness, 2017). Different empirical research works with students, parents, and communication and education professionals in Spain also conclude the negative perception of this type of images that frequently appear in commercial communications -styles, advertising, catalogs on the Internet-, the media, and social networks (Díaz - Bustamante et al., 2020; Narros González et al., 2020)

Another psychological sequence derived from the experience of sexualization is the role of trauma -in the form of imitation-, shame, objectification of the other, and lack of interest in empathy, according to Strozier et al. (2018), who suggest defining this phenomenon more than by the activity itself, by the feelings, ideas, thoughts, and experiences of the individuals who participate in that activity. For example, Diaz Loving et al. (2020) analyze the relationship between a greater acceptance of the sexualization of women and less favorable attitudes towards traditional gender roles, as well as younger age and practice of religion, results that they attribute to a higher educational level of the respondents and greater access to women's empowerment discourses.

Commercial communications transmit, increasingly earlier, to boys and girls an image of the perfect body as a form of seduction to favor the consumerism of that symbolic universe (Rincón Silva, 2012). An example is advertising in children's fashion outlets that projects an image of unreal children-adults; Considering the positive link that minors establish with the advertised product, brands combine measurement models, faces, and real attitudes (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2017). Another example of representation is the mass media, which have contributed to suggesting to minors an idea of self-realization around their process of "sexualization of the self", that is, "the singular appreciation of sexuality, which makes it the basis on which the definition that subjects end up accepting as the most relevant conceptualization of themselves that can be achieved is based" (Fernández Agis, 2007, p. 119). Particularly in music videos, women are doubly objectified and receive five times more hate comments compared to men (Döring and Mohseni, 2019). A more recent study of 1,300 followers of the Youtuber who leads the popularity ranking in parenting and motherhood confirms the negative effect of the excessive exposure of minors and the direct rejection of the commodification of their image in videos where commercial brands are promoted and calls on the competent institutions to protect minors (Elorriaga-Illera et al., 2022).

2. Objectives and research hypotheses

The general objective of this work is to analyze the perceptions of Spanish society about pre-adolescent minors (adolescent girls under 13 years of age) and their attitudes regarding their representation in

advertising and commercial communications to verify if that representation harms them and makes them more vulnerable in society.

From this general objective, the following specific objectives emanate:

1. Acknowledge if in Spanish families there is a perception of violation of the image of preadolescent girls.
2. To determine the personal and family sociodemographic factors associated with the social perception of violation of the image of minors.
3. To identify the attitudes towards this type of representation of preadolescent girls in commercial and advertising communications that also affect a social perception of a violation of the image of minors.
4. Propose an explanatory and predictive model of the social perception of violation of the image of preadolescent girls based on the factors and attitudes previously identified.

Based on the above objectives, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

- H1** Spanish families perceive a violation of the image of preadolescent girls.
- H2** There are significant differences in the personal sociodemographic characteristics and the structure of Spanish households in terms of their perception of violation of the image of preadolescent girls, which translates into the existence of different personal and family sociodemographic profiles of individuals who perceive differently the violation of the image of these minors.
- H3** The attitudes of Spanish families about the representation of preadolescent girls in commercial and advertising communications are associated with their perception of a violation of the image of these minors.
- H4** The probability of perceiving a violation of the image of preadolescent girls by Spanish households depends on personal sociodemographic characteristics and the families themselves and their attitudes towards the representation of these minors in commercial and advertising communications.

3. Methodology

Descriptive and causal research based on a non-experimental analytical cross-sectional design has been carried out. The population under study are Spanish households according to data from the National Institute of Statistics for 2018 (INE Basea, 2018). Thus, national computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) was carried out on 346 people aged 18 or over, members of households throughout Spain. The distribution of the sample responds to the structure of the Spanish population aged 18 and over according to gender and age (INE Baseb, 2018) so that the sample of those surveyed is made up of 51.7% women and 48.3% men, with the following age groups: 18-29 years (14%); 30-44 years (24.1%); 45-64 years (36.2%); 65 or older (25.7%). An indicative error corresponds to this sample size, in the case of applying a simple random sampling, of $\pm 5.27\%$ for a trust level of 95% ($P=Q= 50\%$ and 2 sigmas).

The information was collected in November and December 2019 by the company GAD3 as part of the barometer carried out for The Family Watch Foundation -International Institute for Family Studies. The data obtained have been analyzed with the statistical package SPSS v25.0 (IBM Corp. 2017).

To collect the information, an “ad-hoc” structured questionnaire has been used that incorporates variables related to:

1. The sociodemographic personal characteristics of those surveyed (gender, age, educational level, and occupation).
2. The characteristics of Spanish households (according to their structure and in terms of the number of children).
3. The following perceptions of those surveyed regarding the image projected by adolescent girls under 13 years of age (preadolescents) of their environment:
 - 3.1. Greater value attributed to their physical appearance compared to other abilities: “Adolescent girls give more value to their physical appearance than to other values or abilities”.
 - 3.2. Easy overexposure of their image: “Minors easily overexpose their image”.
 - 3.3. Development of adultizing behaviors not in accordance with their age: “The girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age.”

The choice of these variables is based on the results of various studies related to the perceptions of sexualized women or minors (Cikara et al., 2011; Graff et al., 2012; Daniels and Zurbriggen, 2016).

To measure these perceptions, a five-point scale was used (0= Does not know/ Does not answer, 1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3= Quite a lot, 4=A lot), offering the set of items considered high overall reliability. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.856$).

To facilitate the understanding and visualization of the results of the subsequent analysis of these variables, due to the reduced frequency in some categories and the need and importance of analyzing, in turn, the group that does not express an opinion on the subject or does not have it defined, they have been recoded into two categories. The first corresponds to a “disagreement” perception and “does not know/does not answer” regarding the considered indicators, grouping the valuations 0=Does not know/ Does not answer, 1= Not at all, and 2=A little. The second category corresponds to an “in agreement” perception with the three analyzed indicators, grouping the scores 3=Quite a lot and 4=A lot.

4. The following attitudes of those researched regarding the representation of adolescents girls under 13 years of age -tweens- in advertising and commercial communications, defined from the following opinions on this type of image -based on the conclusions of the Bailey Report (2011) on the sexualization of childhood:
 - 4.1. They spread styles that are not in accordance with their age.
 - 4.2. They show an idealized image that is neither real nor natural.
 - 4.3. They look much older.
 - 4.4. They project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more.
 - 4.5. There is a generalized social acceptance of this type of image.

In all cases, a 4-position scale has been used (0= Does not know/ Does not answer, 1=Disagree, 2=Indifferent, 3=Agree), offering the set of items considered high overall reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.804$).

For the subsequent analysis of these variables, they have also been recoded into two categories: the first, corresponding to an opinion of “disagreement or does not know/does not answer” with the considered variable (grouping the scores 0= does not know/does not answer,

1=Disagree, 2=Indifferent); and the second category, corresponding to an “in agreement” opinion with the analyzed variable (considering the score 3=Agree).

Table 1 summarizes the information regarding the variables used to measure the elements under study in this work.

Table 1. *Elements under study and variables of interest used for their measurement.*

Elementos objeto de estudio	Variables
1. Personal sociodemographic characteristics of those surveyed, members of households aged 18 or over in Spain	Gender Age Educational level Occupation
2. Characteristics of households in Spain	Structure (one person, couple without children, couple with children, father or mother with children, other) Number of children
3. Perceptions about the image projected by tweens (adolescent girls under 13 years of age)	Adolescent girls place more value on their physical appearance than on other values or abilities Minors easily overexpose their image Girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age
4. Attitudes towards the representation of tweens (adolescent girls under 13 years of age) in advertising and commercial communications	They spread styles that are not in accordance with their age They show an idealized image that is not real or natural They look much older They project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more There is a generalized social acceptance of this type of image

Source: own elaboration.

4. Results

The results obtained are presented in this section following the order in which the specific objectives and hypotheses defined in this study have been listed.

4.1. Social perception of the violation of the image of tweens

Regarding the first objective and the first hypothesis (H₁) of this work, and to see if in Spanish families there is a perception of violation of the image of adolescent girls under 13 years of age (tweens), the percentage results associated with the three variables related to the perceptions of those surveyed about the image that these minors project of their environment and that are detailed in block 3 of Table 1 have been taken into account.

As can be seen in Chart 1, the global perception of Spanish families is the majority, approximately 8 out of 10 individuals perceive that tweens easily overexpose their image (78.7%), while they consider that they give more value to their physical appearance than to other values or their abilities (78.8%) and that they assume adult patterns in their behavior that do not correspond to their age (77.7%). These results reflect a negative global perception of preadolescents in current Spanish society; that is, a violated image of these minors that can also increase the vulnerability of this group, which allows us to corroborate the first hypothesis (H₁) of this work.

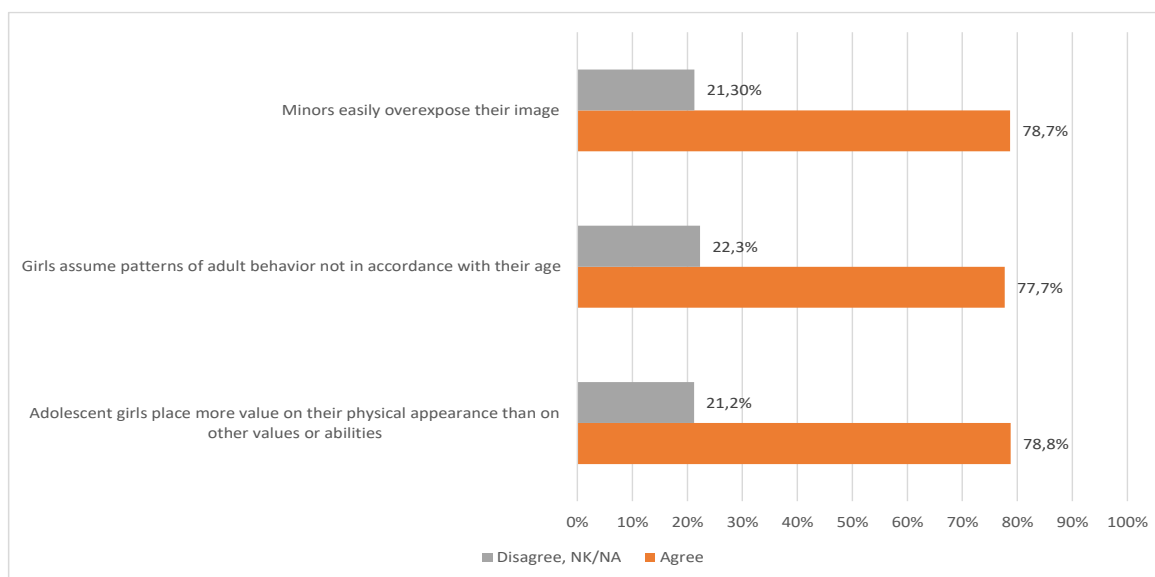


Chart 1: Social perception of the violation of the image of tweens.

Source: own elaboration.

4.2. Personal and family sociodemographic characteristics associated with the perception of image violation of preadolescents

Regarding the second objective and the second hypothesis (H₂) of this work, and to identify the personal and family sociodemographic characteristics or household structure that may be significantly associated with the perception of a violation of the image of preadolescent girls regarding the studied items, the corresponding inferential statistical analysis was carried out with the Chi-Square test as they were categorical variables (Table 2).

In this sense, the statistical results obtained allow us to identify two profiles of representative subjects of Spanish households in terms of the perception analyzed and, therefore, corroborate hypothesis H₂:

1. The individuals who are more sensitive or more aware of the violation of the image of preadolescent girls, and who are significantly more in agreement with the majority of the ideas tested: are men, aged between 18 and 64 years, with secondary educational level, who work in the private sector, individuals who do not have children or who have a maximum of 2 children, and who are part of households with more than one member.
2. People who are less sensitive or unaware of the violation of the image of preadolescent girls, and who show significantly more disagreement with most of the ideas tested or without a definite opinion about them: women, older than 64 years, with primary studies, who perform unpaid domestic work or are retired, who have more than two children, and who are part of one-person households.

Table 2. Association between the perception of the violation of the image of tweens and the personal and family sociodemographic characteristics of those surveyed-Chi-Square Test.

		Adolescent girls place more value on their physical appearance than on other values or abilities		Minors easily overexpose their image		Girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age	
		Agree	Disagree, NK/ NA	Agree	Disagree, NK/ NA	Agree	Disagree, NK/ NA
		% row	% row	% row	% row	% row	% row
Gender	Man	84,4 %	15,6 %	84,4 %	15,6 %	80,4 %	19,6 %
	Woman	69,1 %	30,9 %	67,1 %	32,9 %	68,3 %	31,7 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=3,106$	0,78	$\chi^2=7,433$	0,006**	$\chi^2=4,704$	0,030*
Age groups	18-29 years old	84,8 %	15,2 %	92,1 %	7,9 %	90,3 %	9,7 %
	30-44 years old	85,8 %	14,2 %	83,9 %	16,1 %	85,4 %	14,6 %
	45-64 years old	83,4 %	16,6 %	84,5 %	15,5 %	82,6 %	17,4 %
	65 or older	62,5 %	37,5 %	58,4 %	41,6 %	56,8 %	43,2 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=18,423$	0,000**	$\chi^2=31,130$	0,000**	$\chi^2=30,09$	0,000**
Educational level	Primary-lower	68,4 %	31,6 %	70,0 %	30,0 %	63,3 %	36,7 %
	Secondary	85,7 %	14,3 %	84,2 %	15,8 %	88,2 %	11,8 %
	University	78,5 %	21,5 %	79,1 %	20,9 %	76,1 %	23,9 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=10,925$	0,004**	$\chi^2=6,657$	0,036*	$\chi^2=20,808$	0,000**
Employment situation	Work in the private Sector	85,8 %	14,2 %	89,5 %	10,5 %	89,2 %	10,8 %
	Work in the public Sector	81,8 %	18,2 %	87,8 %	12,2 %	85,7 %	14,3 %
	Self-employed/ Entrepreneur	83,9 %	16,1 %	87,4 %	12,6 %	78,5 %	21,5 %
	Retired-Pensioner	67,2 %	32,8 %	64,7 %	35,3 %	66,2 %	33,8 %
	Unemployed	86,5 %	13,5 %	78,3 %	21,7 %	81,4 %	18,6 %
	Student	90,7 %	9,3 %	100,0 %	0,0 %	93,1 %	6,9 %
	Domestic work	67,1 %	32,9 %	59,9 %	40,1 %	62,6 %	37,4 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=15,249$	0,018*	$\chi^2=29,179$	0,000**	$\chi^2=20,966$	0,002**
Presence of children	Yes	75,9 %	24,1 %	74,8 %	25,2 %	73,7 %	26,3 %
	No	85,9 %	14,1 %	88,5 %	11,5 %	87,8 %	12,2 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=4,261$	0,039*	$\chi^2=8,099$	0,004*	$\chi^2=8,230$	0,004**
Number of children	Up to 2 children	79,2 %	20,8 %	78,9 %	21,1 %	77,2 %	22,8 %
	More than 2 children	67,2 %	32,8 %	63,9 %	36,1 %	64,4 %	35,6 %
	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=3,958$	0,047*	$\chi^2=5,619$	0,018*	$\chi^2=3,998$	0,046**
Type of home	One person	69,6 %	30,4 %	65,7 %	34,3 %	64,5 %	35,5 %
	Other households	80,9 %	19,1 %	81,0 %	19,0 %	80,5 %	19,5 %

	Statistical, sig.	$\chi^2=3,129$	0,077*	$\chi^2=5,779$	0,016*	$\chi^2=6,917$	0,009**
Total		78,8 %	21,2 %	78,7 %	21,3 %	77,7 %	22,3 %
*significant at 5%							
**significant at 1%							

Source: own elaboration.

4.3. Attitudes about the representation of preadolescents girls in commercial communications

To address the third objective of this work and identify the attitudes towards the representation of adolescent girls under 13 years of age in commercial and advertising communications, the percentage results associated with the five variables related to the attitudes under study that are detailed in block 4 of Table 1 were initially considered.

In all cases, Spanish families mostly agree with the negative manipulation of the image of minors in commercial communications (Chart 2). In descending order of the percentages of agreement, the opinion that affirms that advertising shows an image of preadolescent girls much older than they really are (86.4%) is in the first place, followed by opinions that indicate that an idealized image is shown that is neither real nor natural (84.8%), which projects a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more (83.1%), that there is a general acceptance of this type of image and advertising (81.3%), and, lastly, that the styles (clothing, postures) used in these communications are not in accordance with the age of the girls (73.7%).

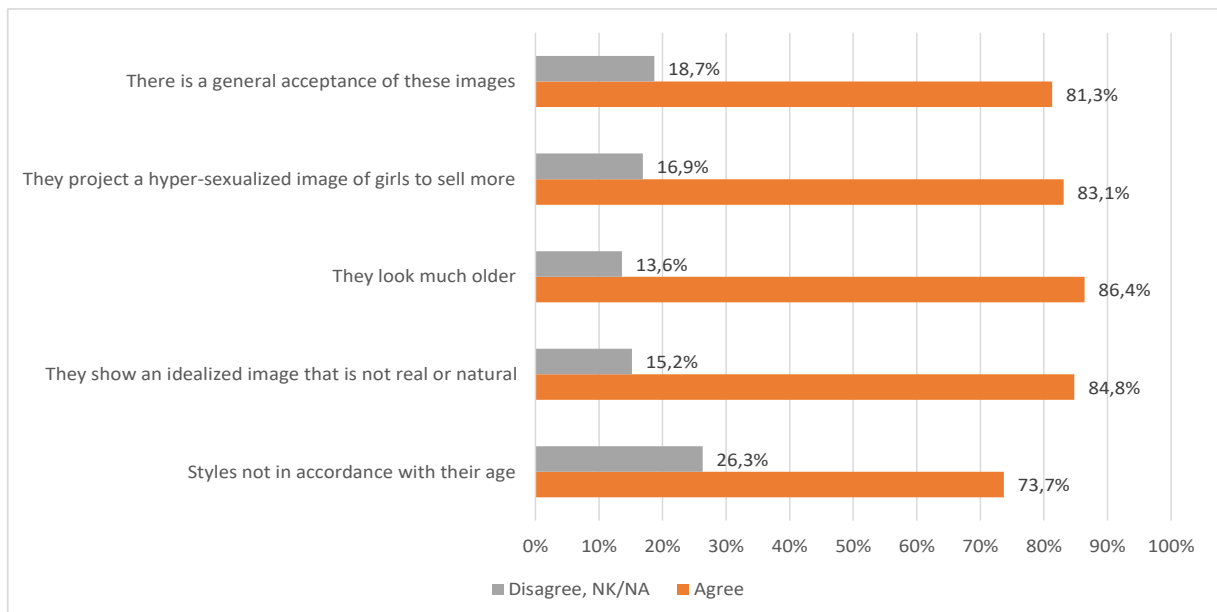


Chart 2: Attitudes about the representation of preadolescent girls in commercial and advertising communications.

Source: own elaboration.

4.4. Association between the perception of infringement of the image of tweens and attitudes about their representation in commercial communications

Continuing with the third objective of the work and concerning the third hypothesis (H₃), we have proceeded to contrast the existence of a statistical association between the perception of violation of the image of preadolescents and the attitudes related to the representation of minors in commercial and advertising communications.

Table 3 illustrates the results of the inferential statistical analysis performed through the Chi-square test. The data obtained allow us to corroborate hypothesis H₃; Practically all of the opinions that agree with the existence of a negative representation of minors in commercial communications are significantly associated with the perceptions that state that they agree with the violation of the image of minors in all the considered indicators (adolescent girls give more value to their physical appearance than to other values or abilities, easily overexpose their image, and assume adult behavior patterns that are not in accordance with their age).

Table 3. Association between attitudes about the representation of adolescent girls in commercial communications and the social perception of infringement of their image.

Representation of tweens in commercial communications and advertising		Adolescent girls place more value on their physical appearance than on other values or abilities			
		Agree % of row N	Disagree, NK/NA % of row N	Chi-square	Significance
Styles not in accordance with their age	Agree	82,9 %	17,1 %	9,848	0,002**
	Disagree, NK/NA	67,2 %	32,8 %		
They show an idealized image that is not real or natural	Agree	81,6 %	18,4 %	8,681	0,003**
	Disagree, NK/NA	63,2 %	36,8 %		
They look much older	Agree	83,0 %	17,0 %	23,477	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	52,2 %	47,8 %		
They project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more	Agree	82,4 %	17,6 %	13,210	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	61,1 %	38,9 %		
There is a general acceptance of these images	Agree	84,2 %	15,8 %	26,590	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	55,3 %	44,7 %		
Total		78,8 %	21,2 %		
Representation of tweens in commercial communications and advertising		Adolescent girls easily overexpose their image			
		Agree % of row N	Disagree, NK/NA % of row N	Chi-square	Significance
Styles not in accordance with their age	Agree	80,2 %	19,8 %	1,294	0,255
	Disagree, NK/NA	74,5 %	25,5 %		

They show an idealized image that is not real or natural	Agree	81,7 %	18,3 %	10,040	0,002**
	Disagree, NK/NA	62,2 %	37,8 %		
They look much older	Agree	82,0 %	18,0 %	14,492	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	58,0 %	42,0 %		
They project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more	Agree	83,5 %	16,5 %	22,771	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	55,2 %	44,8 %		
There is a general acceptance of these images	Agree	83,9 %	16,1 %	24,038	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	56,2 %	43,8 %		
	Total	78,7 %	21,3 %		
Adolescent girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age					
Representation of tweens in commercial communications and advertising		Agree % of row N	Disagree, NK/NA % of row N	Chi- square	Significance
Styles not in accordance with their age	Agree	81,4 %	18,6 %	7,787	0,005**
	Disagree, NK/NA	67,5 %	32,5 %		
They show an idealized image that is not real or natural	Agree	80,3 %	19,7 %	7,217	0,007**
	Disagree, NK/NA	63,0 %	37,0 %		
They look much older	Agree	81,7 %	18,3 %	18,952	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	52,6 %	47,4 %		
They project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more	Agree	81,5 %	18,5 %	14,731	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	58,9 %	41,1 %		
There is a general acceptance of these images	Agree	83,0 %	17,0 %	23,130	0,000**
	Disagree, NK/NA	55,0 %	45,0 %		
	Total	77,7 %	22,3 %		
** significant at 1%					

Source: own elaboration.

4.5. Explanatory and predictive model of the social perception of image violation of preadolescents

Finally, regarding the fourth objective and the fourth research hypothesis (H4), and to quantify and measure the effect of the sociodemographic and family characteristics of individuals and their attitudes on the representation of these minors in commercial communications in social perception of violation of the image of preadolescent girls, three proposals for an explanatory-predictive model have been

developed through the binary logistic regression technique, taking into account the three used indicators. The first model (Table 4) shows that the probability of perceiving that adolescent girls give more value to their physical appearance than to other values or abilities increases as the age of the individual decreases and, above all, when it is stated that tweens are shown to be much older than they are in commercial communications and that there is a general acceptance of this type of image. The goodness of fit of the model has been verified using the Nagelkerke R^2 statistic (0.189) and the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (Chi-square=6.535; $p=0.588$).

Table 4. *Logistic regression model on the perception “adolescent girls give more value to their physical appearance than to other values or abilities”.*

Variables in the equation	B	Standard error	Wald	gl	Sig.	Exp(B)
Girls are portrayed much older than they are in commercial communications	1,145	0,369	9,615	1	0,002**	3,142
There is widespread acceptance of current images of girls in commercial communications	1,040	0,329	9,991	1	0,002**	2,828
Age	-0,027	0,008	12,072	1	0,001**	0,973
Constant	1,048	0,554	3,581	1	0,058	2,852
** significant at 1%						

Source: own elaboration.

The second model (Table 5) defines that the probability of perceiving that adolescent girls easily overexpose their image increases when the individuals are male and as the age of the individuals decreases. But, above all, this probability grows when it is stated that commercial communications project a hypersexualized image of preadolescent girls to sell more and that there is a general acceptance of this type of image. The goodness of fit of the model was verified using the Nagelkerke R^2 statistic (0.235) and the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (Chi-square=15.018; $p=0.059$).

Table 5. *Logistic regression model on the perception “adolescent girls easily overexpose their image”.*

Variables in the equation	B	Standard error	Wald	gl	Sig.	Exp(B)
Commercial communications project a hypersexualized image of girls to sell more	1,134	0,380	8,929	1	0,003*	3,108
There is widespread acceptance of current images of girls in commercial communications	0,767	0,361	4,505	1	0,034*	2,152
Gender	-0,713	0,298	5,738	1	0,017*	0,490
Age	-0,036	0,008	19,849	1	0,000**	0,964
Constant	2,957	0,736	16,139	1	0,000**	19,244
*significant at 5%						
**significant at 1%						

Source: own elaboration.

The third and last model (Table 6) shows that the probability of perceiving that adolescent girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age increases when the individuals are males with secondary education and as the age of the individuals decreases. But, above all, that probability grows when affirming that pre-adolescents are shown much older than they are in commercial communications and that there is a general acceptance of this type of image. The goodness of fit of the model has been verified using the Nagelkerke R^2 statistic (0.267) and the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (Chi-square=8.685; $p=0.370$).

Table 6. *Logistic regression model on the perception “adolescent girls assume patterns of adult behavior not in accordance with their age”.*

Variables in the equation	B	Standard error	Wald	gl	Sig.	Exp(B)
Girls are portrayed much older than they are in commercial communications	1,163	0,397	8,573	1	0,003**	3,201
There is widespread acceptance of current images of girls in commercial communications	0,887	0,345	6,613	1	0,010**	2,428
Gender	-0,625	0,300	4,352	1	0,037*	0,535
Age	-0,034	0,009	15,955	1	0,000**	0,966
Secondary studies	0,776	0,370	4,400	1	0,036*	2,173
Constant	2,209	0,760	8,439	1	0,004**	9,109
* significant at 5%						
**significant at 1%						

Source: own elaboration.

In short, the previous proposals allow us to corroborate the H4 hypothesis and affirm that the variables with the greatest capacity to explain and predict the social perception of violation of the image of minors are:

1. The opinion that tweens are portrayed as much older than they are in commercial communications.
2. The opinion that affirms that commercial communications project a hypersexualized image of pre-adolescents to sell more.
3. The opinion that there is a general acceptance of advertising or commercial images that represent pre-adolescent girls with outfits that do not correspond to their age, in an idealized, unrealistic, and unnatural way, much older than they really are, and hypersexualized to sell more.
4. The age of the individuals.
5. The gender of the individuals.

5. Conclusions

Regarding the first research hypothesis (H₁), this study confirms the existence in Spain of a negative social perception of preadolescent girls in the environment of the respondents based on three specific indicators that the academic literature has previously related to the perceptions of sexualized women and minors: they give more value to their physical appearance than to other abilities, easily overexpose their image, and assume adult behaviors that do not correspond to them. That is to say, it is corroborated

that Spanish families perceive preadolescent girls in their environment with traits associated with sexualized women and minors, which translates into the existence of a violation of the image of preadolescent girls that, also, increases their vulnerability in society. What factors could determine a harmful perception for minors, the majority use of images on the Internet, the incentive to get more followers or money for using body image, or the expectation of feeling better by having an appearance similar to influencers? These results lead us to future research that wonders about the influence of the representations disseminated in all types of commercial communication on the perception of preadolescent girls in our environment, as has an objectified image of women (Karsay and Mathes, 2016; Ruckel and Hill, 2016; Smith et al., 2020). Furthermore, the negative perception that is concluded from this study it suggests that even if the minors chose this type of representation as an expression of their sexual agency, how could this perception enable them to resist self-objectification, as suggested by Hakes and Dune (2013) and Grower and Ward (2021)?

Concerning the second hypothesis (H₂) that has been corroborated in this study, the personal and family sociodemographic profiles of individuals more and less sensitive to the previous violation of the image of preadolescent girls in Spain have been identified. Women are less sensitive than men to the perception of a violation of the hypersexualized image of minors to sell more and the general acceptance by society. Within the male group, the segment of younger individuals finds that preadolescent girls seem older than they are and give greater value to their physical appearance than to other aspects. Within this profile of young men, the characteristic of having a higher education is added to find the segment that is most sensitive to the main sexualization traits mentioned, including that of assuming adult behavior patterns. These results corroborate the idea of Cáceres Zapatero et al., (2013) about the effects of virtual interactions on the quality of communication according to the starting point of the subject. Likewise, these results support the idea that because the use of ICTs by vulnerable young people in Spain is high, frequent, and exclusive, as well as because of the isolation suffered by this segment of young people, they require training in skills that give them access to a more relevant cultural capital (Melendro Estefanía et al., 2016). Developing values that encourage the integration of people as critical and active subjects in the face of the images and content they contemplate means going beyond a mere consideration of minors as consumers of technology (Travieso and Planella, 2008). In short, a comprehensive profile of minors that takes into account the developing characteristics that motivate their greater protection against risks but also their necessary autonomy to guarantee their well-being.

It remains to ask ourselves in future research for the reasons that explain a greater awareness of the overexposure of a harmful image by men when women are the most concerned and dissatisfied with their body image (Oliveira Gonçalves and Parra Martínez, 2014). For example, will it affect the medium from which those images are broadcast? In editorial and advertising content, women are the most sexually represented (Díaz-Bustamante et al., 2020), in music videos, they are doubly objectified (Döring and Mohseni, 2019), and in non-advertising content, women are less represented, are associated with less protagonism, and gender or victim roles (Matud Aznar et al., 2017).

Among the most interesting findings of this work is the one related to the third hypothesis (H₃), which has also been corroborated, and demonstrates the existence of a statistical association between the perception of violation of the image of preadolescent girls (or negative perception) of the image that these minors project in today's society and the attitudes or critical opinions of individuals towards how these pre-adolescents are currently represented in advertising and commercial communications through the different media. This finding invites us to reflect on the fact that minors assimilate and prescribe a type of image that the respondents perceive as detrimental to their development. The data from this research points to the tendency of influencers to give greater importance to physical value than to other aspects and that minors have connected the relationship between bodily display and the success of the most followed influencer accounts that promote more and better brands. However, what

is the price of that learned behavior? By its nature, the language of social networks is the one that is shared, even if it is the most intimate - that is why we speak of extimacy when we talk about intimacy on the Internet. It is necessary to study the conditions in which a majority acceptance is given to the personal exhibition of a public whose physical and moral integrity is specially protected by law. The fact of being a vulnerable user could influence the perception of vulnerability, since Spotswood and Nairn (2016) reveal that, in new advertising formats, such as advergaming, adults are just as vulnerable as adolescents.

Due to the social expectation of public interest that this phenomenon entails, the acquisition of a type of competence in children from the hand of media references could become a factor of social inclusion. For example, in the school environment, children between 6 and 19 years old talk about their pictorial communications through gamers on YouTube and Twitch, and adolescents develop digital skills through escape rooms in the Communication Faculties of Spanish universities (Cascales González, 2021). For these encounters to be favorable to minors, influencers must be responsible in their communication of commercial objectives. In this sense, the *Libro Blanco del Influencer* (iCmedia, 2021) makes recommendations for all agents involved in this industry due to the impact of influence on minors. They are still the same conduct guidelines applicable to any communicator: transparency in paid content and information sources, and respect for public sensitivity. However, they are novel due to the consideration of the influencer as a communication professional, given that they carry out work with important social repercussions.

This work concludes, regarding the fourth hypothesis (H4) that has been corroborated, with the definition of a novel statistical model that explains and predicts the probability that individuals may negatively perceive preadolescent girls in terms of giving more value to their physical appearance than to the rest of their abilities, easily overexpose their image, or assume adult behaviors that do not correspond to them, depending on the attitudes of the individuals themselves about the adultized, hypersexualized, and idealized representation of these minors in commercial communications and on the general acceptance of this type of commercial images of minors, and depending on the gender and age of these individuals. These variables could be completed in a later study with other sociocultural characteristics such as body image and the race of the respondents since their influence as predictors of concern about appearance has been demonstrated (Frederick et al., 2022). Likewise, the effects of projecting a sexualized image could be studied in preadolescent girls, just as the effect of an unreal image (thin, adultized) of the child-juvenile body on disaffection with their body or eating disorders has been studied (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2017).

It is also worth asking about the level of awareness of parents and educators about their knowledge of the mechanisms established by current legislation in Spain to denounce brands that communicate unhealthy styles. Do those who guide the behaviors know what the vital references of minors are, and could they raise their sights on development to aspects where personal success supposes a comprehensive benefit? In this sense, a recent sample of 792 boys and girls from 5 to 9 years old in Spain concludes that the higher educational and professional level of mothers and fathers is an opportunity to understand the consumption of screens and design family strategies to promote digital media education and critical thinking (Jiménez-Morales et al., 2020). To what extent do educational centers and parent associations use resources to develop these skills?

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