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CHILDREN'S OBESITY IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE ACTIONS OF THE MEDIA.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Michel Obama has launched a campaign called « let's move »¹. It points out the fact that a lot of areas of the United States are free of supermarkets which conducts people to feed themselves in the local markets that usually do not provide fresh food. She has obtained from the most important retailers, such as Wal-Mart, Supervalu, Walgreens, the ability to propose a wider range of fresh products for lower prices. That is why one of the biggest retailers 'engagements is to open supermarkets in those areas. For instance, Wal-Mart promised to open between 275 and 300 supermarkets in those specific regions: 330 million dollars are dedicated for this national project. Why that much? For the reason 32% of children (from 2 to 19 years old) are obese².

Obesity is one of the sicknesses the easiest to recognize but hardest to treat and prevent. In

the United States, it has become the major health issue for the government because of disastrous data showing its rapid increase in the last few years. In order to fight against this dramatic phenomenon, the government and media have decided to collaborate, targeting parents first. Indeed, children are the first victims and recent studies have shown than more than 80% of the children will be obese if their parents already are³.

There is a difference between overweight and obesity. Overweight is the fact to have "an extra body weight from muscle, bone, fat, and water"⁴. However, obesity is "having a high amount of extra

body fat". The use of Body mass index (BMI) is based on height and weight and help doctors and specialists understand the issue.

We will illustrate our project with a current polemical issue. With their well known slogan "It took us 30 years to get us all talking about childhood obesity", Strong4life are at the core of the debate with their polemical campaigns. Their main objective is to target parents in order to make them realize the danger

¹ Le point, « USA, actions against obesity », available at :
<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/07/21/9700120110721FILWWW00330-usa-actions-contre-l-obesite-infantile.php>(last viewed February, 10th 2012)

² Unknown author, "Children's obesity in the USA", available at:
<http://www.actualites-newsenvironnement.com/16192-obesite-infantile-Etats-Unis.html> (last viewed February, 11th 2012)

³ Unknown author, "facts for families", available at:
http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/obesity_in_children_and_teens (last viewed February, 10th 2012)

⁴ National Heart Lung and blood, « What are overweight and obesity"available at:
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/obe/> (last viewed, February, 10th, 2012).

occurring to their children if they do not fight against their health problem⁵. It can have several consequences such as coronary heart diseases, gallstones, diabetes⁶.

In our project we will introduce you first the methodology we will adapt for our researches, before going ahead and exposing the main facts of our topic. Then, we will talk about the strategies the media have adopted in order to struggle against obesity and how they have implemented them within the American society. Finally, we will relate our topic with our MIM courses such as Managing Innovation and Technology and Social Media. In our annexes, you will be able to see the interviews we will realize thanks to the direct contribution of American protagonists.

METHODOLOGY

The second chapter will focus on methods. For the issues oriented paper on The impacts of social campaigns on children's obesity in the US, it has to be decided whether a quantitative or qualitative research has to be adopted. Choices of methods will be discussed and justified in order to accurately lead the project on the Issues oriented paper.

Quantitative or Qualitative?

Characteristics of both researches

Researchers can carry out their researches with a lot of different methods but there are two main researches which are the quantitative and the qualitative. However, debates between those two types of methods have never stopped thus this issue has been a dilemma since ages. Nonetheless, before going into the process on an investigation both quantitative and qualitative methods have to be studied in order to be conscious of strengths and weakness of each and then justify the research method used.

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.92), affirm "quantitative research is empirical research in which the researcher explores relationships

using numeric data" where as qualitative research "is any type of research that produces findings which have not been discovered through statistical procedures or other means of quantification". The main difference concerns the scientific argument thus the quantitative research is supposed to be more factual and reliable because information and evidences can be figured out with numbers and theories. In general, quantitative method are used to analyze factions of people and demographic. Pickard (2007, p. 146) said the purpose of survey research is to gather and analyse information by questioning individuals who are either representative of the research population or are the entire research population. However, qualitative research also uses surveys because it has a descriptive aspect useful for qualitative data.

Which research?

Patton (1978, p.28) assumes both quantitative and qualitative type of data has both limitations and strengths. That is why some researchers will recommend the triangulation (Simon and Hittleman 2001) which consist in using data from different types of researches. Besides, "mix method" (Creswell and Clark, 2006, p.136) is "the use of multiple data collection techniques compensates for any limitations of individual techniques" (Marshall and Rossman, 1990, p.42). Mix method may appear as a way to present deeply a study but even if using the strength of each research can compensate the weakness of both, only the qualitative research is here useful to this research study.

It follows from all this analysis that quantitative research is not appropriate in this research study. Numerical data, graphics or statistics are not useful to demonstrate and determine the the impacts of social campaigns on children's obesity in the US. We have fixed that three interviews will be a great opportunity to collect different rich data and opinions from three different interviewee. The results of these interviews will then be discussed and analysed.

Interviews

During the research interviews will be done to collect data because the researcher is searching for rich and descriptive details. Pickard (2007)

⁵ Strong4life, "Learn" available at: <http://strong4life.com/> (last viewed February, 10th 2012)

⁶ CDC, « Obesity and overweight for professional: health consequences » available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html> (last viewed, February, 11th, 2012).



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established "*Interviews are usually used when we are seeking qualitative, descriptive, in-depth data that is specific to the individual*"; In general, interviews are used for "*descriptions and feelings about current events and predictions of future events*".

During the three interviews a semi-structured interview will be used: prepare a number of questions in order to design and give a framework to the interview. However, depending on the flow of the interview and the answers of the interviewee some more questions may be asked and other not.

MAIN FACTS

Over the past decades, obesity has become a major concern in the United States. Indeed, alarming data reveal one person for three is concerned about this sickness. The rate has not diminished for 10 years in any of the 50 states of the country and until 2006, there was an evolution of 5% per year. This phenomenon keeps on bringing worries to the government and institutions because it is the only one cause of deaths (among alcohol, drugs and sexual relations) which has known a boom that high for the last few years⁷. Children have become the first preoccupation because of the dramatic increase of obese among them: 23 million.

Every year, the government must deal with the growth of its budget granted to the medical sector because of those health issues. It represents more than 10%, which means an amount of \$147 billion per year. An overweight person will have a medical budget care superior of 40% in comparison with a healthy person. According to the last researches from Ali Mokdad and his

coworkers from "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", every year, this sickness is responsible for more than 400000 deaths, second cause after the tobacco (with 430000 deaths)⁸.

Obesity does not result from only one factor and can be explained by several ones. The most important will obviously concern food habits of American people. In the daily file, snacking and nibbling have become common gestures for a majority of the population, who has lost regular and specific lunch and dinner times. This loss of references explains the disorientation of the body and the inability to regulate itself. Its desire of food will be high and constant all day long. This new way of consumption has considerably been encouraged with the high development of fast food chains. Some researches show that ¼ of the population is at least eating once a day in a fast food. The common American orders every week 3 hamburgers and 4 portions of fries. The movie "Super size me", from Morgan Spurlock, illustrates perfectly the effects of junk food on the body and its health consequences. Indeed, it is a documentary following him for one month, eating in the famous restaurant chain "Mac Donald" 3 times a day. The title of its film is humorously sarcastic and makes reference to the menu "super size" he had to chosen to eat, which made him took more than 11kgs. As a consequence and after only 30 days, he got kidney, liver and cholesterol issues. Thanks to this report and its worldwide extension, the restaurant will be forced to stop providing this menu⁹.

⁸ Claude, « Evolution de l'obésité aux USA depuis 1985 », available at <http://www.infrench.net/2008/02/08/evolutionde-l-obesite-aux-usa-depuis-1985/>, last viewed February 26th, 2012

⁹ Unknown author, « Super size me » available at http://www.rottentatoes.com/m/super_size_me/,

⁷ Unknown author, "Mortelle obésité aux Etats Unis", available at http://www.futura-sciences.com/fr/news/t/medecine/d/mortelle-obesite-aux-etats-unis_3395/, last viewed February 26th, 2012

Furthermore, the tendency of the society, promoting technology and the use of high tech items instead of practicing sports, has committed disastrous consequences on the daily habits of American teenagers.

Consequences on the body resulting from obesity are numerous: diabetes, hypertension, sleeping problems, dependence towards some aliments and so on. However, this sickness will affect as well the psychological state of people concerned. Indeed, the victims will usually feel guilty of their body, ashamed and depressed because of the reject from the others. Unfortunately, society can be cruel with the weakest and most sensitive persons. They are most of the time targets of sneers, mocking remarks and even insults. A famous research from Yale University reveals that obesity is the 4th major cause of discrimination, behind the sex, age and origin factors.

At school, students do not feel sorry and are most of the time extremely unkind with their school friends who are not following the common norms. They do not hesitate isolating one of the children because of the overweight problem. However, discrimination goes on even after school, once the person will start searching for a job. It will be more difficult to obtain a work because of prejudices existing within the society and having a big influence: indeed a boss will perceive an obese person as someone lazy, without perseverance and any goals in his life. Furthermore, it can have negative consequences in the daily life as well. For instance, when taking common means of transport, a new legislation has been applied where are asking obese people to pay two tickets instead of one. Regrettably, this new law it is not an isolated fact.

Some surveys affirm in United States in 2035, 37% of men and 44% of women of 35 years old will be obese. It is a result without any precedent and alerts all the institutions and pushes them to react. This is the reason why the government and institutions keep on searching solutions more and more innovative in order to fight against this sickness. The medical field is effectuating some researches

and provides advice to the population through slogan such as “eat to live: don’t eat to live” or “eat healthy”. The government has launched several actions in order to fight against obesity in the United States. Today, there is a law on which they are working on, which would impose a tax on products judged unhealthy and dangerous for the population. Furthermore, many associations have been created, such as “The National Action Against obesity”, whose main aim is to reduce the discriminations and prejudices existing within the society¹⁰.

Solutions in order to fight against obesity are numerous but complicated and can not guarantee a full success. The problem is obesity results from unhealthy behavior from the person, attracted by the abundance and rapidity of food consumption. Causes are social, scientific and morals and create a reject from the society and numerous discriminations. It is a situation where it is often scarce to get better on our own: help is vital in the cure process.

As a consequence, we could wonder if the solution the most efficient would be the media influence, in order to help changing the state of mind and behavior of the daily life¹¹.

STRONG 4 LIFE’S CASE

The organization

Strong4Life has been created recently in January 2012 in Georgia¹² in order to protest against the obesity phenomena among children. Strong4Life has launched a controversial campaign in a society where obesity is perceived as a burning issue but above all as a taboo¹³. Various campaigns

¹⁰Unknown author, “Obesity in the USA” available at <http://tpeles-obesity-usa.e-monsite.com/pages/solutions>, last viewed February 26th, 2012.

¹¹M Deieil and Dr Ashton, “Lutte contre l’obésité: les USA contre le reste du monde” available at <http://www.obesitydiet.com/lutte-contre-l-obesite-les-usa-contre-le-reste-du-monde-M2-R230.html>, last viewed February 26th, 2012.

¹² Unknown author, “Stong4Life” available at : <http://strong4life.com/> (last viewed, March 4 2012)

¹³ Unknown author, “Obesity and media” available at “<http://www.mamavation.com/2012/02/victory-strong-4-lifebillboards-coming-down.html> (last viewed, March 4 2012)



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aimed to target grown up so as to make them realize of their lifestyle; however Strong4Life has decided to target children in this campaign but creating a feeling of guiltiness in parents' minds¹⁴.

Campaigns

The campaign appears in two main medium that are billboards and video spots.



Analysis of the billboards campaign

The first billboard is an image mainly in black and white except from the word "warning" that is written in capital letters and in red and the lines that separates the pictures of 4 kids. This underlines the fact that this image will warn us about something. First of all, the four children are in bad mood, obviously fat and crossing their arms, as a sign of confinement and isolation as the code of body language suggest us. Then the 4 kids are all from various ethnical origins: White, Black, and Hispanics, which underlines the idea that obesity among children is a general issue that concerns all social categories and races.

All children have a picture with a message at the bottom of their pictures in capital letter, the rectangular aspect and the short message reminds us of the message preventive message written in the cigarettes box that are made to warn people. This parallel let us understands that obesity is something parents can prevent from growing concerning their children.

The messages we can read are:

¹⁴ Unknown author, "New campaigns" available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/onparenting/post/strong4life-campaign-shocks-us-into-caring-about-childhood-\(last viewed, March 4 2012\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/onparenting/post/strong4life-campaign-shocks-us-into-caring-about-childhood-(last%20viewed,%20March%204%202012)/obesity/2012/01/02/gIQAwCdYYP_blog.html)

- "*Chubby kids may not outlive their parents*": This sentence aims to be provocative as there is a morbid implied suggesting to parents that because of them their own kids may die due to their obesity.

- "*Fat kids become fat adults*": This sentence sounds like a proverb or moral expression that is common and those parents should know.

- "*Big bones didn't make me this way, big meals did*": This sentence tends to reinforce the idea that being obese is directly a consequence of junk food and the big amount of food that children eat under the eyes of their parents.

- "*He has his father's eyes, his laugh and maybe even his diabetes*": This sentence stands out how children tend to reproduce their parents habits, parents are the example of their kids so they should be a model to follow concerning the healthy habits to adopt to avoid overweight.

Analysis of the video spot: available at: <http://strong4life.com/> (Bobby, "why am I fat")¹⁵

This spot made in black and white lasts 33 seconds. There are various scenes:

-the first scene shows two empty white chairs in a unknown place and a kid and we guess its mother come from different sides to sit face to face. They are both overweighted.

-The second scene focus on the children that says "mom, why am I fat" with a sad face then we see also the mother that has no answer and only sigh .

-Then we have the message "75%of Georgia parents with overweight kids don't recognize the problem, stop sugarcoating it, Georgia".

¹⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysIzX_iDUKs&feature=youtu.be

The aim of this video spot is clearly to make guilty the parents of those overweighted kids. The main point of this video turns around the question that the kid ask to his mum as he doesn't why he is different from the other kids and why this is happening to him. Besides, the reaction of the mother shows how parents tend to hide the reality pretending not seeing the overweight problem of their kid. This spot is creating with a lot of pathos, meaning the use of emotions and empathy is high but also with some logos due to the figure and percentage presented at the end of the spot.

Impacts of this campaign

Many debates and controversial problematic have been raised with this campaign¹⁶¹⁶. People have been chocked and impressed by such a campaign.

Positive aspects:

-a campaign that created the buzz: even if the campaign might be seen as hard as it changes people' habits and eye on obesity, it can finally be said that associations and governments are trying to fight against this issue.

-denunciation of children's taboo around obesity and overweight: this underlines children's unhappiness being in such a body and being unable to do something.

Negative aspects:

-the major negative aspect is that some specific children have been pointed out with this campaign and some people may think this is not going to help them in their life.

-Another negative aspect, is that people may feel rejected by such a campaign thinking that the American society will not accept those kind because they are not "normal" and people want them to be in a same bag.

RELATION WITH MIM COURSES

International Trade and Business (Annexes 1 & 2)

Globalization has affected every daily life of people all around the world. Every country has seen a change, either via its economy, culture

or social characteristics. The massive exchanges of goods and people have participated in the change of the population's way of lives. Food habits are one of the characteristics which have known a considerable impact over the last decades, having consequences on the culture of population. Indeed, an important event has been the extension of fast food chains, such as Mac Donald's, Burger King, Subway or KFC. Before the extension of Mac Donald's, fast foods were not so popular among the population and the competitors were few on the international market. By promoting junk food, snacking and nibbling gestures, they have profoundly affected the worldwide culture, especially the American one where they are the most numerous. Indeed, this country has the most important number of fast foods and almost 2 million of people are working in this area. As a consequence, of part of the economy rely on their profitability. Teenagers represent a key target in their strategy and the use of mass communication will permit them to attract and influence better their target, from their youngest¹⁷ age.

Social media management

The relationship between media, food habits, nutrition and sportive activities are complex but one thing is sure: the implication of media can not be denied in the recent obesity boom. For the last few years, the amount of advertising and commercials promoting high-fat, high-salted and high-sugar foods have increased significantly. Every day, teenagers are target of verbal and non verbal messages encouraging them snacking, nibbling or go to their favorite fast foo whenever they want during the day. Furthermore, the consequence of media on the behavior is the inactivity process which has and keeps on increasing. The problem with American young people is their dependence towards media: A famous study from Kaiser Family Foundation revealed a child between 8 and 18 years old will be in direct relation with social media 6 hours and 43 minutes every day. Every tools studied

¹⁶ Unknown author, "Campaign is Georgia" available at: <http://www.about-face.org/georgias-strong4life-campaig nrelies-heavily-on-fat-shaming/> (last viewed, March 4, 2012)

¹⁷

<http://rw303.wetpaint.com/page/McDonald%27s,+globa lization+and+culture>.



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during our lecture have been used to encourage people follow the mass consumption state of mind through several means of communication (Facebook, Google). This is the reason why the influence media can have is highly criticized in the society. They need to have a sense of ethics and think about the impact they can create on the population. In order to fight against obesity problem, the government and associations have decided to focus their hopes on media. The number of campaigns and advertising promoting healthy food and sportive activities have highly increased but it might be too last to inverse the previous impact the have had¹⁸.

Managing innovation and technology:

Because of mass communication, companies need to work very day on their strategy marketing to keep the customer focus. Indeed, every day a person will be the target 15000 stimuli. This is the reason why, in order to fight in a more efficient way against obesity, associations have decided to innovate in order to maximize their impact. The case of strong4life campaign illustrates perfectly the concept we learnt during this lecture. Their advertisements and commercials, only on black and white, diffuse chocking images, slogan. It has created a buzz few days only after the launch of the campaign. Innovative strategies for media seem to be the only one strategy to keep on struggling against obesity if they want to avoid seeing 37% of men and 45% of women obese in 2015. The United States need a wake up call¹⁹.

CONCLUSION

Obesity in the United States is a concern everybody is aware of. The reason why we

have decided to focus our paper on it is for the reason we wanted to analyze the situation from another angle, less tackled: the children. In the course of the drafting of our project, we have been able to analyze the situation from a professional and neutral point of view thanks to the lectures we have been attending to during this semester.

Each year, the number of victims keeps on increasing dramatically putting the government in a sensitive situation. Indeed, this sickness is not only limited on a the physiological aspect, but affect the psychological stability of the patient which is even more the negative effects are not limited only to the shape of the body, otherwise to the psychological side as well which is sometimes even worst. As a consequence, the government and associations have decided to behave and fight against this phenomenon changing their strategies. Until now, the impacts are negligible and the American population does not seem more concerned and involved in this common struggle. The association strong4life has adopted another approach, focusing more on strong images and slogans using parents' guilt. The opinions among people diverge, which has been illustrated even stronger with the interviews we had the opportunity to realize thanks to the contribution of two witnesses.

The main issue is obesity is part o the American daily behavior and can not be changed only with restrictions from so government or speeches from influent people. In spite of the disastrous assumptions revealing in 2025 almost half of the population will be obese, the government and associations keep on expressing their hopes. We could end our paper wondering if the wake up call for the United States has not become only a utopia...

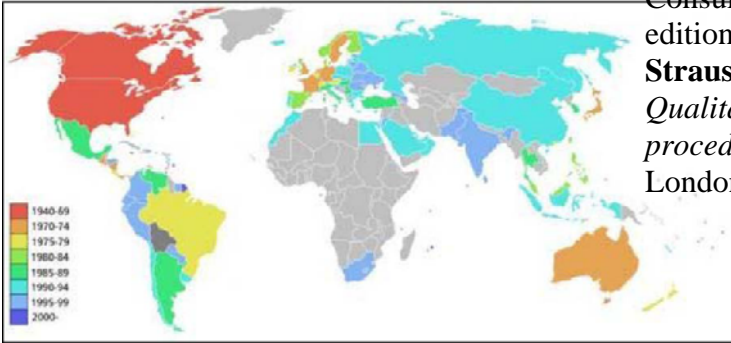
¹⁸

http://www.ucsfbenioffchildrens.org/education/obesity_and_the_media/index.html

¹⁹ <http://www.etopia.be/spip.php?article569>

ANNEXES

Annex 1: “Extension of Mac Donald’s since its creation”



The graphic above represents the year of implementation from the famous chain Mac Donald’s. We can notice the United States was the first location but then, encouraged by globalization, it has successfully spread its influence all over the world.

Annex 2: “Number of Mac Donald’s in the USA”



Each light on this cart shows the implementation of a Mac Donald’s restaurant. We can see their significant presence of the territory and understand better the changes of food habits they have been responsible for²⁰.

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²⁰<http://marie-et-pauline-tpefastfood.e-monsite.com/pages/les-fast-foods-un-mode-de-restauration-qui-s-est-propage-dans-le-monde-entier.html>

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