

PREFACE

The idea behind the feature book, *Children – Consumption, Advertising and Media*, came from an international seminar on Children's Socialization as Consumers and their Perception of Advertising held by the Forum for Advertising Research, Department of Marketing, Copenhagen Business School in June 2001. At this seminar it was decided that it would be a valuable contribution to the field to gather together the newest international research on children and advertising.

We thank all the authors for their contributions and interest in being a part of this book. Furthermore, a special thank you to our research assistant, Lotte Yssing Hansen for her outstanding work in both reviewing the contributions and in the finalizing phase of the book. Thank you also to research assistant Lars Bech Christensen for his work in reviewing the contributions to the book.

*Flemming Hansen and Jeanette Rasmussen
Frederiksberg, June 2002*

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CHILDREN

– CONSUMPTION, ADVERTISING AND MEDIA¹

By Anne Martensen and Birgitte Tufte

INTRODUCTION

Research into *children and advertising* has been carried out internationally for many years. Until recently most of the research has taken place in the United States and Canada (Adler 1980, Dorr 1987, Seiter 1995, Pecora 1998, Ward, Wackman & Wartella 1997).

With increasing interest among politicians, parents, teachers and others all over the world due to globalization of the media – and the possible influence of advertising on children – the topic has gradually appeared on the agenda of European researchers as well (Bjurström 1994, Schultz Jørgensen (ed.) 1992, Borch 1996, Brembeck & Johanson 1996 (ed.), GfK 1997, Gunter & Furnham 1998, Sverdrup & Lunde 1995, Tufte 1993, 1999, Werner 1994).

A characteristic feature of research into advertising in general and in relation to children in particular is that it has taken place in the private as well as in the public sector. As early as in the 1920s and 1930s, private companies in the United States carried out large-scale market research. Public-sector research into advertising at universities and other institutions of education is more recent. Research into advertising has therefore always been characterized by different interests and resources.

Generally it can be said that the connecting thread in research has followed developments in media research, which means a shift from the effect of the content of media to an increasing interest in how media products are used in everyday life and how messages are decoded and understood. In other words, this represents a move from research into the effect of media to research into receptive and cultural studies. Whereas early media research focused on the sender perspective (the stimulus-response model), to an increasing extent modern-day research focuses on recipients, i.e. the ways in which recipients use the media in relation to their daily life and customs, their social relations and culture. A number of recently published studies on television, which focus on recipients, conclude with a new concept on »strong viewers« – that an active production of meaning takes place in the viewing situation, and that neither children nor adults are significantly affected. The concept of »the strong viewer« can be seen as analogous to the concept of the »competent child« and theories on children as constructive actors presented in recent child culture research (James et al. 1998, Qvortrup et al. 1994).

The American media researcher Ellen Wartella commented recently that a shift in paradigms has taken place in research, which focuses on children and media. While conclusions in the early phase promulgated that children were severely affected by the media, recent research has supported what she refers to as »the strong child« paradigm, since many studies suggest that children are able to distinguish between fact and fiction and adopt a critical attitude to media content. Ellen Wartella suggests more research is needed that focuses on children as persons who need protection, depending on their age, but who are also curious individuals capable of acting individually.

The idea of 'direct' effect preoccupied early media researchers many of whom argued that TV programming content was cognitively processed. Accordingly they tended to examine how children were influenced by and learned from TV by conducting simple experimental tests. Over the years, however, there has been a gradual shift from focusing on the effect of the media. Today theories from various disciplines are used when researchers are working with media, advertising and consumption. Interdisciplinary approach has become a key concept as will be seen from the collection of chapters in this book.

The aim of the book is to present recent studies made by researchers working in the field of consumption, advertising and media in relation to children, in order to shed light on the relationship between consumer behavior, advertising and communication in general and especially in relation to children and adolescents.

There seems to be no direct connection between the influence of advertising and consumer behavior. A range of variables play a role and the perspective should rather be from the recipient's point of view than from that of the sender (Katz & Liebes

1984, 1988, Höjjer 1990). As mentioned earlier, mass communication theories are analogous to theories on »the competent child« and not least on the consumer as active and competent (Young 2002).

The discussion about children's understanding of television advertising and children as consumers has intensified recently in European countries, since advertising targeting children was banned in Sweden. With the Swedish presidency of the European Union (EU) during 2001 many people thought that the Swedish ban on advertising to children might be extended to all EU states. So far this has not been the case.

For many years it has been a central issue in public debates as to whether children are able to distinguish between commercials and the content of programmes.

Several studies show that most children are able to distinguish between the content of programmes and commercials when they are about seven years old. However, it is also emphasized that some children are able to make the distinction by the age of 3 or 4, while others are not able to do so until the age of 9 or 10. It has also been documented that the ability to distinguish between commercials and the content of programmes is closely related to children's ability to understand the purpose of advertising. If children understand the purpose of advertising they will to a greater extent be able to distinguish between programmes and commercials. The age at which children are able to understand the purpose of advertising and the extent to which they understand it depends very much on their family's attitude to advertising and the role played by their school in explaining and discussing the subject.

Many of the studies carried out on children and advertising and on children as consumers end up pointing to the necessity of what is called *advertising literacy* or *media literacy*. Nevertheless, media literacy is still lacking in educational curricula in the schools of most countries.

When it comes to studies regarding *children as consumers* there has recently been a growing interest in this field internationally. State of the art is given in one of the chapters in this book (Roedder John 2002), but even in the Nordic countries where the topic is new on the research agenda some research has been published (Frønes & Brusdal 2000, Feilitzen 1999, Drotner 2001, Halling & Tufte 2002). Most of the studies mentioned are qualitative with a cultural approach and are linked to children's role in relation to mass media. However, quantitative data and interesting new aspects on children as consumers are presented in a recent publication from the Forum for Advertising Research, Copenhagen Business School (Hansen et al. (ed.) 2002).

METHOD

Empirical studies can be categorized in several ways; however, the most important distinction is probably whether the study is of a qualitative or quantitative nature.

Qualitative studies, where relatively few unstructured exploratory interviews are carried out, e.g. in the form of in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective techniques and the like, has by far been the most commonly used data collection method for studies focusing on children, their socialization process and the factors that influence it. Rarely are quantitative studies carried out using a larger representative sample of children and a more or less structured questionnaire followed by certain statistical analyses.

The reason for this is that qualitative studies are often carried out when the knowledge of the studied area is limited. In this case, as a first step, a qualitative study may contribute to a greater understanding of the problem – this knowledge can then be used to develop hypotheses. However, in order to confirm or refuse the proposed hypotheses, it is necessary to carry out a quantitative study. The purpose of the quantitative study is precisely to discover whether the trends that appeared on a small scale will reappear on a larger scale. Thus, quantitative research is a form of conclusive research. During the last 25 years, researchers have been very interested in the research areas ‘children’s socialization process as consumers’ and ‘children and advertisements’, however, the areas have been characterized by great heterogeneity with a great number of theoretical approaches. Further, the possibilities of proposing hypotheses that could subsequently be tested quantitatively have been limited.

Another important reason why studies have so far largely been of a qualitative nature is that the respondents are children. This relates to several issues, such as:

- Preschool children cannot read and so cannot complete a written questionnaire. Therefore, if the target group consists of children under the age of 7–8 years, the minimum requirement is that the parents participate in the study. In this case, the question becomes whose attitude is being measured, the children’s or the parents’?
- Questionnaires of a certain length require great patience on the part of the child, so neither telephone interviews nor personal interviews are suitable. Only postal questionnaires that can be returned to several times seem workable.
- Depending on the child’s age, her/his vocabulary clearly limits the type of questions that can be asked. Therefore, many studies have merely observed the children in more or less ‘natural’ surroundings to register their behavior.
- Small children, in particular, find it difficult to comprehend several different types of scales (Likert scale, Semantic scale, Paired comparison scale etc.) and more than a very few (measured 2–3) answering categories.

Even so, in relation to the studies described in the present book, it is interesting to note two aspects. First, it is worth noting that both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are used in the described chapters. Secondly, the qualitative and quantitative results and conclusions correspond very well.

The last-mentioned fact prompts us to conclude that quantitative studies are also well suited as a method of data collection when dealing with children, and that the two methods of analysis should therefore be used in conjunction with each other in the future. The qualitative studies are used to gain preliminary insight into the problem and to develop a number of hypotheses, which may subsequently be tested quantitatively to elucidate the general application of the results. In certain situations, the quantitative results may also give rise to the identification of new problem areas where the existing knowledge is inadequate, and where further qualitative studies are needed.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of 10 chapters written by researchers from different countries.

The first section presents reviews of research in relation to consumption, advertising and media, the following section present new studies regarding the topic of the book; the ninth chapter focuses on the ethical implications of consumer behavior principles in relation to children, followed by the final chapter which discusses the commercialization of the classroom.

In CHAPTER 2, »Consumer Socialization of Children: A Retrospective Look at Twenty-Five Years of Research«, *Deborah Roedder John* provides an excellent literature review of the extensive research carried out over the last 25 years within the area of children's socialization process. The 'humble beginnings' for this area of research came in the shape of an article by Scott Ward in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1974, which defined children's socialization as »processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace«. Since then, many different research directions and theoretical approaches have been adopted, which has made the area very heterogeneous.

Deborah Roedder John perceives the structuring of the most important contributions throughout the last 25 years as a challenge. She approached the task by developing a new conceptual framework to describe the stages of consumer socialization, which may be seen as a further development of theories on consumer socialization, for example Piaget (1957), Selman (1980) and Barenboim (1981)

Children's knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are largely a function of how old they are, which makes age the most important factor for children's development as consumers. Accordingly, Deborah Roedder John's frame of reference is developed around three age groups: 3-7 year olds are characterized as being at the conceptual stage; 7-11 year olds as being at the analytical stage; and 11-16 year olds as being at the reflective stage. For each of the three age groups, she explains what typically characterizes the children as to their cognitive and social development, that is, what knowledge do the children have, what are their motives and how do they think and behave as consumers in different situations as they get older?

The frame of reference for children's consumer socialization will henceforth be the point of departure for a discussion and literature review of five central areas that represent the outcomes of the socialization process and therefore to a lower or higher degree exerts influence on children's knowledge, skills, motives and values. The five areas are as follows:

- 1 Children's advertising knowledge
- 2 Transaction knowledge (including knowledge particularly related to products, brands, shopping and pricing)
- 3 Children's decision making skills and strategies
- 4 Purchase request and negotiation strategies
- 5 Children's consumption motives and values

The many empirical studies related to the three age groups once again support children's growing sophistication about products, brands, advertising, shopping, pricing, decision-making strategies and influence approaches.

The final part of the chapter provides a perspective of the area. Deborah Roedder John discusses the inadequacy and vagueness of the present theoretical as well as empirical studies, and also where future research, in particular, should be focusing its efforts. Each of the five areas mentioned earlier is addressed. Among the most significant questions that need to be answered, the following should be highlighted:

- 1 How does persuasion knowledge develop for children over the age of 12?
 - Persuasive intent of advertisements?
 - Specific advertising tactics and appeals?
 - Type of bias or deception in advertisements, social context?

How can this insight be used for public policy concerns about adolescent response to advertisements for products such as cigarettes and alcoholic beverages?

- 2 How do children of different ages interpret and understand brands in relation to:
 - Consumption symbolism at brand name level?
 - What influences children's perception of brands, and how can they be changed?
 - How does such an understanding relate to values in society (materialism etc.)?

- 3 Understanding of children's shopping skills:
 - How do these skills develop over age?
 - What factors initiate such changes?
 - How do children compare different product attributes such as size, price, volumes and so on?
 - How do children understand the concept 'value for money' (price contra quality)?

- 4 What decision strategies do children possess at different ages, and how do these strategies emerge over time (especially age 7-11)?

- 5 What goals do children of different ages have for consumer decision-making in relation to:
 - Choosing a novel product, being surprised, having fun and so on?
 - How do these goals differ from adult goals (making good decisions with least cognitive effort/rational input, buying the best product and so on)?
 - How do children's goals compare to decision-making skills and behavior in different age groups?
 - How do changes in goals during childhood influence the decision-making process?

- 6 How does the family influence the development of:
 - Children's advertising, persuasion and transaction knowledge?
 - The children's decision-making skills?
 - The children's consumption motives and values?
 - How does different family communication patterns influence these areas?
 - How do other children and different institutions influence knowledge, skills and values?

- 7 What influence do technological changes have on children's socialization process?
 - Internet, mobile phones, cable TV and the like

As you will see later, the present book's contributions will answer some of these questions.

The CHAPTER 3 by *Cecilia von Feilitzen*, »Times are Changing and Youth with Them. On Young People's Media Use in Sweden«, gives a description of the new global media landscape, which is changing rapidly with increasing access to more TV channels, national and international. She focuses on the changing media landscape and the generation factor, with Sweden as an example.

The increasing amount of media and the convergence of them provide the same media products to larger and larger parts of the world which means more and more advertising and more new advertising formats addressing not least children and young people.

The average media use of Swedish 15–24 year olds is 6½ hours per day, and – as she emphasizes – although the press says that the computer and the Internet have taken over TV viewing it is a fact that TV is the most important media for young people. She concludes by mentioning the five media that the 17 year-old young people in Sweden found most important in terms of entertainment/pleasure and knowledge/information. Boys as well as girls were of the opinion that television was the most important medium for entertainment/pleasure, whereas the boys gave priority to the Internet and the television when it came to knowledge and information. The girls would choose books first and television second. In relation to this, Cecilia von Feilitzen points to the need of conducting future in-depth studies with regard to what young people mean by more general expressions such as »facts and information«, »knowledge and information«, »news« and the like.

The CHAPTER 4 written by *Flemming Hansen, Jens Halling and Jens Carsten Nielsen*, »Danish Children's Upbringing as Consumers«, begins by describing the background of the research project »Danish Children as Consumers« in relation to the Forum for Advertising Research. The project dates back to 1999 and was inspired by Deborah Roedder John's chapter published in this book.

In 2000 Forum obtained access to large parts of a children's index database within Gallup/Taylor Nelson Sofres's annual children/youth media index. When the data became available there was a large amount of interesting information regarding children's behavior and upbringing as consumers that has now been collected in a book (Hansen et al. 2002). The chapter presents some of these data on children's economy and saving abilities, children and the emerging electronic world, brand awareness, transaction knowledge and shopping, media use and interest and activities in general. The chapter provides a picture of Danish children and young adolescents as active and busy with school, friends, sport, work, duties, entertainment and shopping. From an early age they have their own money and savings, and they become increasingly aware of money-related issues as they grow up. They exert influence in relation to the consumption of the family, and as they grow older they make their own purchases. They

control their own media consumption and take part in electronic networks. The chapter argues that these Danish children and young adolescents are the first computer literate generation, a viewpoint which is not, however, shared with all of the other authors of this book, several of whom argue for media literacy as a necessity.

The authors emphasize that the findings are based on a collection of quantitative data, which means that it has not been possible to examine certain problems dealt with in the international research. However, the chapter gives an interesting summary of some of the findings and presents a varied picture of children's and young people's upbringing as consumers in a modern society.

Throughout modern history, many studies have focused on the effect of TV-advertisements on children, paying particular attention to the influence advertisements have on children's purchases of the advertised products or their pestering. The results have given rise to heated debates. One school of researchers and practitioners feel that advertisements have a damaging effect on children and that restrictions and limitations of the TV-advertisements should be employed for this age group. The other school of researchers, on the other hand, feels that the education of children should be emphasized to a higher degree, so that they learn to understand the purpose of advertisements more quickly and can see through their devices to finally be able to use advertisements as a natural part of their decision process.

In the CHAPTER 5, »Children and Advertising: Politics and Research in Consumer Socialization«, *Adrian Furnham* categorizes many contributions into 'opposite approaches', which he terms 'Educationalists' versus 'Protectionists' approaches and 'Academic' versus 'Public Policy' approaches. These two approaches perhaps simplify reality, nevertheless they provide a solid foundation for studying and understanding the development within the area of 'advertisements directed at children'. *Adrian Furnham* concludes that »the differences between educationalist and protectionist, and between researcher and public policy people means that this whole area is marked more by rhetoric than research«.

Adrian Furnham continues with a discussion of the role and influence parents exert over the wishes of their children to buy the products that are being advertised. Different empirical results show that advertisements directed at children have only one factor of influence, which is quite weak compared to the influence the parents hold. Findings show that parental styles in teaching consumption affect children's consumer knowledge, preferences and habits, and that children imitate their parents' behavior in shops.

Thus, *Adrian Furnham* believes that »we need to teach our children about advertising, what a commercial is and what it is trying to accomplish. You can't be coerced

into doing something you don't want to do if you know and understand the process. Banning advertising of any sort shelters or at least delays a child's understanding and decision-making. It can be no substitute for parental guidance and influence. The responsibility for educating children into the economic world cannot be removed from their parents«.

The great majority of studies carried out to elucidate the area of children and advertising has so far been of a qualitative nature. *Anne Martensen* and *Flemming Hansen* have broken with this research tradition as their study is based on a large quantitative survey that was completed in the autumn of 2000 using 1600 children in the ages of 8-18 years. The survey was carried out using questionnaires; small children completed the questionnaire with the help of their parents. The results of this survey are based on approximately 50 questions.

With the CHAPTER 6 »Children's Knowledge and Interpretation of Commercial Advertising – Intentions, Truthfulness and Viewing Habits«, the authors examine four factors, namely: 1) Children's understanding of the intention of advertisements; 2) Children's perception of advertisements and different types of advertisements; 3) Children's perception of the credibility of advertisements; 4) Children's viewing of advertisements. Starting with a literature review, 17 specific hypotheses were proposed for the elucidation of these factors. The hypotheses were subsequently tested using the collected data from the quantitative survey. The most important results and implications of the survey are:

- Children understand the intention of advertising as early as 8 years of age. If advertisers want their messages to be taken seriously by the children, they must be designed in a way to make them appear credible and honest to children.
- Children perceive advertisements as lacking content – they want quality advertisements. They also develop a critical attitude to advertising at an early age, but despite their skepticism advertisements still influence their wishes and purchases. Such a clear result cannot be inferred from Adrian Furnham's study, which showed that advertisements only represent one among many factors that influence purchases, the most important factor, as mentioned earlier, being the parents.
- All this seems to indicate that the socialization process of children starts earlier as well as quicker than anticipated. Banning advertisements for children under the age of 8 is therefore more likely to result in children's socialization process being inhibited until the age of 8, as small children will not have the same opportunity of developing a critical attitude to advertising. Incidentally, this attitude clearly corresponds to Adrian Furnham's conclusion.

- Finally, the results show that children as young as 8 years watch many advertisements for children as well as advertisements for adults. Further restrictions and regulations of children's advertisements therefore seem meaningless. Following Adrian Furnham, the authors recommend that children should be taught to become more critical consumers and use advertisements more constructively.

Brian Young's CHAPTER 7 »The Child's Understanding of the Intent behind Advertising« gives a brief overview of his background (development psychologist oriented towards linguistics). He says he is looking for theories of communication and sees advertising as a form of communication with several functions. His theory of communication is suitable for explaining and predicting what children do with the different functions of advertising. Another aspect of Young's theoretical approach is the use of development theories. He focuses on the child's understanding of the intent of advertising and discusses its importance, partly based on psychological but mostly legal reasons. He comments on the history of banning with reference to the US and Sweden.

At the end of the chapter Young refers to some of his own research on the promotional aspect of advertising pointing at the ability of the children in relation to advertising literacy.

In the CHAPTER 8, »The Impact of Children's Affective Reactions Elicited by Commercials on Attitudes toward the Advertisement and the Brand«, *Christian Derbaix* and *Joël Bree* discuss a large empirical study they undertook on the impact of children's affective reactions elicited by TV-commercials on attitudes toward the advertisement (A_{ad}) and the brand (A_b).

They preceded the study with a literature review of the cognitive and affective reactions elicited by the advertisement, and, in accordance with the theory of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, they found that the attitude towards the advertisement may come from three main predictors, namely the central elements of the message, the peripheral elements of the message and the affective response elicited by the advertisement.

Second, they studied the literature on the affective responses of children as consumers, and concluded that children are far more susceptible to details such as the tone of voice, the presence of small animals, etc. than adults are. Furthermore, the affective response has a very positive influence on the attitude towards the brand.

However, using theories on children's socialization process, it is also emphasized that children under the age of 9 years cannot distinguish between their attitude towards the brand itself, their attitude towards the brand depicted in the commercial and their attitude towards the advertisement itself. Thus, if there is a connection

between their attitude toward the advertisement and the brand, this connection could be a natural consequence of reality or merely result from pure coincidence. The authors conclude that the link between A_{ad} and A_b for children remains hypothetical rather than validated by empirical research.

This led the authors to develop a conceptual model for the connection between a number of affective reactions in children caused by TV-advertisements and two effect variables, i.e. the children's attitude towards the advertisement as well as the brand, which they wished to test empirically.

Using the conceptual model as their point of departure, they propose four hypotheses to be tested empirically, i.e.: 1) A_{ad} has a direct and positive effect on A_b ; 2) Judgment of the advertisement's characteristics has a direct effect on A_{ad} ; 3) Verbal and non-verbal affective reactions elicited by the advertisement partly has a direct effect on A_b , but also an indirect effect via A_{ad} ; 4) The effect of the verbal and non-verbal (facial expressions) affective reactions elicited by the advertisement is greater than the a priori attitude toward the brand as well as the judgment of the advertisement's characteristics.

The study, which used 770 children aged 7-10 years in as 'natural' surroundings as possible, confirmed that none of the affective reactions, with the exception of A_{ad} , mediate the impact of verbal affective reactions on A_b . In addition, the authors found that verbal affective reactions are important predictors of A_{ad} and A_b , whereas the contribution of facial expressions is limited. This result made the authors recommend that verbal measurement be used when measuring affective reactions elicited by advertisements.

Dan Freeman and Merrie Brucks' CHAPTER 9 »Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco Use Prevention Efforts: Benefits and Challenges of Targeting Young Children« discusses why a new prevention programme strategy will be necessary in the future, as well as the challenges that might eventuate from the operationalization of the programme.

The authors use the metaphor of a river to describe the socialization process leading from childhood naïveté to drug, alcohol and/or tobacco abuse or addiction. Traditionally, prevention efforts have been directed at teenagers, probably because of the view that it is possible to measure the effect of the efforts on the target group. However, the purpose of focusing on small children as well is to »create and maintain deeply held attitudes that will predispose the child against controlled substance use initiation«, which, according to the authors, requires that »early prevention programs focus directly on the promotion element of the marketing mix«.

The authors emphasize four reasons why the resources are put to much better use when the communication efforts are also directed at the small children: 1) It is easier

to develop attitudes than to change existing ones, 2) Children are more susceptible to persuasion than teens; 3) Children are less likely to respond with psychological reactance than teens; and 4) Children have the potential (or – ‘a high potentiality’) to become cessation advocates.

When an early prevention programme is about to be initiated, four factors need to be considered: 1) Effective age-appropriate messages must be developed; 2) The children must understand the risk of drug, alcohol and tobacco use without their curiosity being aroused; 3) Unintended consequences for non-targeted groups of youths must be avoided; and 4) New prevention programmes without adverse effects on current substance users must be initiated.

According to the authors, carrying out an early prevention programme using these guidelines will create a synergy effect. As the children will have been acquainted with the negatives sides of drug, alcohol and tobacco use throughout their childhood, these will have a strong presence in their minds when they are confronted with the situation for the first time. This will decrease the probability of youths trying such drugs or, even worse, becoming addicted to them.

Whiton S. Paine in his CHAPTER 10, »Some Implications of Consumer Behavior Principles When Kids are Involved«, focuses on ethical issues in relation to two cases i.e. Barbie & Ritalin. The role of the doll Barbie has been enormous. Barbie has gradually become a cultural icon that both reflects and influences the culture, social values and family life. Over the years various groups have accused Barbie for socializing girls in ways that lead to poor body image, eating disorders, and materialism. Accordingly Barbie has undergone different changes, and is still selling well.

Ritalin is a drug made by Ciba-Geigy, which has had the approval of parents, experts, teachers and doctors as the main treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). According to Paine the area of drugs for children creates serious and growing ethical challenges.

The case of Ritalin illustrates how a company (Ciba-Geigy) was able to create a community of parents, experts, teachers and doctors that were united in their approval of Ritalin as the main treatment of ADHD.

Using Barbie and Ritalin as examples Paine emphasizes that companies must constantly re-examine their role in the marketplace. The members of these brand-oriented communities have the potential to reinforce appropriate, or inappropriate, cultural values and marketers can influence this process.

Nancy Jennings begins in her CHAPTER 11 »Advertising, Branding and Consuming: The ABC's of Marketing in American Schools« by saying that marketers have realized that

children are three markets in one i.e. they spend their own money, they influence their family's purchases and through their own consumer experiences as children, they can become brand loyal into adulthood. As a result there has been increasing interest in reaching young consumers. She describes different forms of commercialism in schools and comments that despite growing concerns regarding commercialism in the schools, public policy often falls behind public practice. And practice is often very different in different states; for instance, New Mexico law allows advertising in and on school buses whereas Virginia regulation prohibits such practices. Florida law permits school boards to establish policies regarding fundraising in schools, whereas New York regulations prohibiting commercial activities on school grounds.

Jennings concludes by saying that the commercialization of schools is a double-edged sword, providing materials and technology to schools while exposing them to more advertising and corporate sponsorship.

The only solution is that parents, teachers, administrators, legislators and the industry work together to address concerns and create a legitimate response to this growing phenomenon.

NOTE

1 Part of the chapter; English Translation. Tina J. Hindsbo, MA.

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2

CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN

– A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF RESEARCH

By Deborah Roedder John

INTRODUCTION¹

Scholarly research examining children's consumer behavior dates back to the 1950's with the publication of a few isolated studies on topics such as brand loyalty (Guest 1955) and conspicuous consumption (Reisman and Roseborough 1955). Further recognition of children as a consumer market followed in the 1960's, as researchers expanded their scope of inquiry to understanding more about children's understanding of marketing and retail functions (McNeal 1964), influence on parents in purchasing decisions (Berey and Pollay 1968; Wells and LoSciuto 1966), and relative influence of parents and peers on consumption patterns (Cateora 1963). Though few in number, these papers were extremely important in terms of introducing the topic of children's consumer behavior to a marketing audience, presenting empirical methods and data pertaining to children, and communicating results in mainstream marketing journals.

Clearly, the pioneering work of researchers in the 1960's had set the stage for more widespread and programmatic research on children. But, it was not until the mid-1970's that research on children as consumers blossomed and gained visibility in the marketing community. This turn of events was based largely on public policy concerns about

marketing and advertising to children, which emerged as consumer activist groups such as Action for Children's Television (ACT) and government bodies such as the Federal Trade Commission became vocal in their criticisms of advertising to young children.

About this time, a further impetus to development of the field occurred with the publication of a *Journal of Consumer Research* article entitled »Consumer Socialization,« which argued forcefully for studying children and their socialization into the consumer role. The author, Scott Ward, defined consumer socialization as »processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace« (Ward 1974, p. 2). This definition gave focus to a new generation of researchers and an emerging field of study pertaining to children as consumers.

Twenty-five years later, an impressive body of research has accumulated on the topic of consumer socialization. Researchers have explored a wide range of topics reflecting children's growing sophistication as consumers, including their knowledge of products, brands, advertising, shopping, pricing, decision-making strategies, and parental influence and negotiation approaches. Also examined have been the »social« aspects of the consumer role, exploring the development of consumption symbolism, social motives for consumption, and materialism. Clearly, we have amassed a great deal of information regarding what children know about the marketplace and their roles as consumers.

The purpose of this paper is to merge findings from the last twenty-five years of research into a unified story of the way consumer socialization proceeds as children mature throughout childhood and adolescence. Integration of findings, both within and across topic areas, has been seldom attempted due to the vast body of heterogeneous literature that exists on children as consumers (for examples, see Moschis 1987; Young 1990). To provide an organizing theme, we focus on age-related developments in consumer socialization, with the objective of characterizing what children know and how they think as consumers at different ages. We develop a conceptual framework that identifies age-related patterns across areas, describes major characteristics of knowledge and reasoning at those ages, and identifies developmental mechanisms behind these changes.

In doing so, the review focuses on research reported by consumer researchers, published in marketing and communication journals, covering the period from 1974 to 1998. In effect, this excludes consideration of research by economists and psychologists pertaining to children's economic concepts (e.g., money values, saving, resource scarcity) and research by public health and medical researchers pertaining to children's consumption of products such as cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs. Findings from

research in other areas, or from studies prior to 1974, are included on occasion only to provide context or corroboration for more recent work by consumer researchers. We also exclude consideration of consumer research pertaining to children but outside the realm of consumer socialization. In effect, this excludes: (1) studies of the effects of advertising strategies, such as host selling or repetition, on children's responses to advertising (for a review, see Adler et al. 1980); (2) content analyses of television commercials aimed at children; (3) surveys of parental responses to children's purchase requests and parental views about advertising and marketing to children; and (4) discussions of specific public policy issues and regulatory debates.

This review is divided into three parts. First, we provide a conceptual overview of consumer socialization, summarizing important theoretical views on cognitive and social development and developing a conceptual framework that describes stages of consumer socialization. These stage descriptions identify general characteristics of children's knowledge, skills, and reasoning and specify ages at which these stages are likely to occur. In the second part, we present five sections that review research pertaining to the development of consumer knowledge, skills, and motives in children and tie these findings to our conceptual framework. Reviewed are findings about children's advertising knowledge, transaction knowledge (products, brands, shopping, and pricing), decision-making skills and strategies, purchase request and negotiation strategies, and consumption motives and values. In the final part, implications are drawn for future theoretical and empirical development in the field of consumer socialization.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

The period from birth to adolescence contains dramatic developments in cognitive functioning and social maturation. Children develop abilities to go beyond perceptual appearances to think more abstractly about their environment, acquire information processing skills to more readily organize and use what they learn about their environment, and develop a deeper understanding of interpersonal situations, which allows them to see their world through multiple perspectives.

Cognitive and social development during this period provides a backdrop for the growing sophistication children exhibit in understanding and performing in the consumer role. Age-related improvements in cognitive abilities contribute to the development of consumer knowledge and decision-making skills. For example, well-devel-

oped cognitive abilities facilitate the process of evaluating products, comparing them against other alternatives, and purchasing the chosen item from a store. Age-related improvements in social development are similarly helpful. Many consumer situations involve interpersonal understanding, from impressions children form about people who use certain products or brands to negotiation sessions with parents in an attempt to influence the purchase of desired items.

In this section, we describe several conceptual frameworks covering aspects of cognitive and social development. Selected for discussion are frameworks deemed most relevant for understanding aspects of consumer socialization and most important for understanding major changes that occur from preschool to adolescence. Common to these frameworks is a focus on successive stages of development, with each stage characterizing children's thinking, reasoning, and processing at particular ages. Next, we integrate these views to develop a conceptual framework for consumer socialization. Using the notion of stages, we propose that consumer socialization be viewed as progressing in a series of three stages, which capture major shifts from the preschool years through adolescence. We describe the characteristics of children's consumer knowledge, skills, and values at each stage and specify the approximate ages at which children move from one stage to the next.

STAGES OF COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Cognitive Development. The most well-known framework for characterizing shifts in basic cognitive abilities is Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which proposes four main stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (birth to two years), preoperational (two to seven years), concrete operational (seven to eleven years), and formal operational (eleven through adulthood) (Ginsburg and Opper 1988). Vast differences exist in the cognitive abilities and resources available to children at these stages, including the preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages of most interest to consumer researchers. The preoperational stage features children who are developing symbolic thought but are still very focused on perceptual properties of stimuli. Preoperational children tend to be »perceptually-bound« to the readily-observable aspects of their environment, unlike concrete operational children, who do not accept perception as reality but can think about stimuli in their environment in a more thoughtful way. Preoperational children are also characterized by »centration,« the tendency to focus on a single dimension. In contrast, the concrete operational child can consider several dimensions of a stimulus at a time and relate the dimen-

sions in a thoughtful and relatively abstract way. Finally, in the formal operational stage, children progress to more adult-like thought patterns, capable of even more complex thought about concrete and hypothetical objects and situations.

Beyond Piaget's approach, information processing theories of child development provide additional explanatory power for the types of cognitive abilities evidenced by children as they mature. Several formulations of information processing theory exist, but all share a focus on children's developing skills in the areas of acquisition, encoding, organization, and retrieval of information. In the consumer behavior literature, children have been characterized as belonging to one of three segments – strategic processors, cued processors, and limited processors – based on information processing skills they possess (Roedder 1981). Strategic processors (age 12 and older) use a variety of strategies for storing and retrieving information, such as verbal labeling, rehearsal, and use of retrieval cues to guide memory search. Cued processors, ranging in age from 7 to 11 years, are able to use a similar set of strategies to enhance information storage and retrieval, but typically need to be aided by explicit prompts or cues. Cued processors exhibit »production deficiencies,« referring to the fact that they have the ability to use processing strategies but do not spontaneously produce these strategies when needed. Finally, most children under the age of seven are limited processors, with processing skills that are not yet fully developed or successfully utilized in learning situations. These children are characterized as having »mediational deficiencies,« referring to the fact that they often have difficulty using storage and retrieval strategies even when prompted to do so.

The cognitive orientations described by these stages provide a basis for explaining the emergence of a variety of socialization outcomes, which will become evident as our review unfolds. To illustrate, consider for a moment the evidence about children's growing abilities to understand advertising as a persuasive medium distinct from television programming. As we will soon describe, younger children (preschoolers) distinguish commercials from programming on the basis of perceptual features (e.g., advertisements are shorter) instead of motive and intent (e.g., advertisements are intended to sell products). This result fits nicely with the notion of perceptual boundness in preoperational children. By the time children reach eight years of age (concrete operational stage), they possess quite a bit of knowledge about advertising's persuasive intent and bias. Yet, this knowledge is not necessarily accessed and used in evaluating advertising messages. Information processing views provide a ready explanation for this finding in terms of children's abilities at this age to retrieve and use information. Although 8 to 11-year-olds (cued processors) have a good deal of knowledge about advertising, their ability to retrieve and use this knowledge is still developing.

Social Development. The area of social development includes a wide variety of topics, such as moral development, altruism and prosocial development, impression formation, and social perspective taking. In terms of explaining aspects of consumer socialization, we consider social perspective taking and impression formation to be the most directly relevant for our consideration. Social perspective taking, involving the ability to see perspectives beyond one's own, is strongly related to purchase influence and negotiation skills, for example. Impression formation, involving the ability to make social comparisons, is strongly related to understanding the social aspects of products and consumption.

Developments in social perspective taking are addressed by Selman (1980), who provides a particularly apt description of how children's abilities to understand different perspectives progress through a series of stages. In the preschool and kindergarten years, the egocentric stage (ages 3-6), children are unaware of any perspective other than their own. As they enter the next phase, the social informational role taking stage (ages 6-8), children become aware that others may have different opinions or motives, but believe that this is due to having different information rather than a different perspective on the situation. Thus, children in this stage do not exhibit the ability to actually think from another person's perspective. This ability surfaces in the self-reflective role taking stage (ages 8-10) as children not only understand that others may have different opinions or motives, even if they have the same information, but can actually consider another person's viewpoint. However, the ability to simultaneously consider another person's viewpoint at the same time as one's own does not emerge until the fourth stage of mutual role taking (ages 10-12). This is a most important juncture as much social interaction, such as persuasion and negotiation, requires dual consideration of both parties' perspectives. The final stage, social and conventional system role taking (ages 12-15 and older), features an additional development, the ability to understand another person's perspective as it relates to the social group to which he (other person) belongs or the social system in which he (other person) operates.

Impression formation undergoes a similar transformation as children learn to make social comparisons on a more sophisticated level. Berenboim (1981) provides a cogent description of the developmental sequence that takes place from 6-12 years of age. Before the age of six, children describe other people in concrete or absolute terms, often mentioning physical appearances («Nathaniel is tall») or overt behaviors («Elizabeth likes to play softball»). However, these descriptions do not incorporate comparisons with other people. In Barenboim's first stage, the behavioral comparisons phase (ages 6-8), children do incorporate comparisons as a basis of their impressions, but the comparisons continue to be based on concrete attributes or behaviors («Matthew runs

faster than Joey»). In the second stage, which Barenboim calls the psychological constructs phase (ages 8-10), impressions are based on psychological or abstract attributes (»Christopher is friendly«), but do include comparisons to others. Comparisons based on psychological or abstract attributes do not emerge until the psychological comparisons phase (11 or 12 years of age and older), which features more adult-like impressions of people (»Sara is more outgoing than Angela«).

The usefulness of these frameworks for understanding aspects of consumer socialization can be illustrated by continuing our analysis of why younger children do not understand advertising's persuasive intent until they reach elementary school. The ability to discern persuasive intent requires one to view advertising from the advertiser's perspective. According to Selman's stages, this does not typically occur until children are 8-10 years of age. The ability to reason about advertisers' motives for specific advertising tactics and techniques, such as celebrity endorsers and humor, requires even more detailed thinking. Not only is there consideration of dual viewpoints (advertisers and viewers), but also reasoning about what techniques would be effective for what types of situations. Consistent with abilities characterized by Selman's last stage, we see knowledge of advertising tactics and appeals emerging in early adolescence and developing thereafter.

STAGES OF CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

Consumer socialization occurs in the context of dramatic cognitive and social developments, which are often viewed as taking place in a series of stages as children mature throughout childhood. We propose that consumer socialization also be viewed as a developmental process that proceeds through a series of stages as children mature into adult consumers. Integrating the stage theories of cognitive and social development reviewed earlier, a clear picture emerges of the changes that take place as children become socialized into their roles as consumers. These changes occur as children move through three stages of consumer socialization – which we have named the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage (see Table 1).

Characteristics	Perceptual stage, 3-7 years	Analytical stage, 7-11 years	Reflective stage, 11-16 years
<i>Knowledge structures:</i>			
Orientation	• Concrete	• Abstract	• Abstract
Focus	• Perceptual features	• Functional/underlying features	• Functional/underlying features
Complexity	• Unidimensional	• Two or more dimensions	• Multidimensional Contingent («if-then«)
Perspective	• Simple • Egocentric (own perspectives)	• Contingent («if-then«) • Dual perspectives (own + others)	• Dual perspectives in social context
<i>Decision-making and influence strategies:</i>			
Orientation	• Expedient	• Thoughtful	• Strategic
Focus	• Perceptual features	• Functional/underlying features	• Functional/underlying features
Complexity	• Salient features • Single attributes	• Relevant features • Two or more attributes	• Relevant features • Multiple attributes
Adaptive Perspective	• Limited repertoire of strategies • Emerging • Egocentric	• Expanded repertoire of strategies • Moderate • Dual perspectives	• Complete repertoire of strategies • Fully developed • Dual perspectives in social context

Table 1. Consumer socialization stages

These stages are characterized along a number of dimensions that capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision-making skills, and purchase influence strategies. In terms of knowledge development, the movement from the perceptual to the reflective stage is marked by shifts from concrete to abstract representations, from perceptual to underlying features of objects and events, from simple to more complex representations with multiple dimensions and contingencies, and from an egocentric to a socially-aware perspective. Changes in decision-making and influence strategies are characterized by similar dimensions, moving from an expedient to strategic orientation, from an emphasis on perceptually-salient features to more relevant underlying