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Introduction

David Marshall

The aim of *Understanding Children as Consumers* is to look at how we view children as consumers and to consider the extent to which they are actively engaged in the marketplace as the buyers, users and recipients of consumer goods. This edited collection draws on recent research and academic expertise within the area of consumer behaviour and childhood consumption. It looks at a range of age groups but is primarily focused on children aged 8 to 12 years old. As a number of commentators have noted, childhood is firmly embedded in the commercial marketplace (Langer, 1994, 2005; Cook, 2004) and a major challenge is to understand the ways in which young consumers negotiate this terrain.

In (re)thinking children as consumers we need to recognize the ubiquity of the marketplace in children's everyday lives and consider the ways in which they experience this commercial world, be it through exposure to various forms of media, visiting retail stores, making requests for products, or purchasing goods with their own money. With direct and indirect marketing to children on the increase there is a question over how children engage with this commercial world. A number of discussions, for example, around food marketing and childhood obesity, online activity and sedentary lifestyles, or increased materialism among the young tend to place children as hapless victims subject to the onslaught of marketing activity. While we have often excluded children from debates about consumption, manufacturers and retailers have long recognized the role of children as consumers and acknowledged their contribution to family decision making (Kline, 1993; Cross, 1997; Cook, 2004).

With this growth in marketing to children some commentators have gone as far as claiming that children are suffering from 'marketing related diseases' and that we are witnessing the 'hostile takeover of childhood' in a 'toxic' commercial environment permeating all aspects of young lives (Schor, 2006, citing commercialalert.com; see also Linn, 2004; Palmer, 2007). Seen from this

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perspective, this once commercial-free arena of childhood is increasingly populated with attempts to 'lure' young consumers, and their parents, into ever more consumption, with a variety of devious tactics that include recruiting children to promote products in the playground and online through social networking sites, as well as by using a variety of promotional tactics that 'play on their dreams and exploit their vulnerabilities' (Mayo and Nairn, 2009: xvii). Underpinning this moralising is an assumption about children as 'consumers' and a question over the extent to which they are either vulnerable and exploited in the commercial environment to which they are exposed or competent and savvy individuals. As Cook (2004: 7) notes, 'The dichotomous construction of the exploited child and the empowered child arises from a lingering tension between markets and moral sentiment: it is a tension which, at least since the beginning of industrialisation, continues to inform considerations of childhood'. Resolution of this tension, according to Cook, occurs where goods are considered beneficial and functional, as is the case with educational goods, or when children are seen as full *persons* who desire goods and can exhibit some degree of agency. Gunter and Furnham (1998: 7) argue that children resemble other (adult) consumers in many ways and exhibit a degree of sophistication and pragmatism in their approach to the marketplace to the extent that they are both 'active and discerning' in their consumption. Similar views are expressed by David Buckingham (2000, 2006, 2008) in his accounts of children and media. One only needs to consider their knowledge about latest toys, or the hottest characters on collectible cards, the 'best' sports players, or the coolest websites.

These issues form the basis of what this book is trying to do in looking critically at children¹ as active consumers, but it differs from previous accounts by trying to address the key issues and uncover what being a consumer means to children themselves – namely, from their perspective!² This attempt to give children some voice in the debate is sympathetic to the idea that they should have some say, that their opinions matter, and that they have some 'agency' as consumers and 'social beings' in their own right (James et al., 1998).³

Marketing to children

To put this idea of vulnerable or competent consumers into context let us consider where much of the discussion about children as consumers has been centred thus far – on marketing to children. One of the most influential writers in the field remains James McNeal. His books include *Children as Consumers: Insights and Implications* (1987) and *The Kid's Market Myths and Realities* (1999) and he offers interesting insights into young consumers. These, along with texts like Guber and Berry's *Marketing To and Through Kids* (1993), raised the profile of the children's market and generated interest in the notion of children as consumers. Much of their focus was on how to market to children as opposed to what children are doing with marketing.

Later texts such as Acuff's (1997) *What Kids Buy and Why: The Psychology of Marketing to Kids*, or Del Vecchio's (1997) *Creating Ever Cool: A Marketeer's Guide to a Kids Heart* attempted to unpack the key to successful marketing. Cross offers an historical account of child's play in *Kid's Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (1997) and *The Cute and the Cool: the Wonderous Innocence of Childhood* (2004) where he looks at changes in the children's market in the USA. Cook's historical account of the commercialization of children's fashion with *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (2004) shows that the idea of marketing to young consumers is not some new phenomenon but part of a gradual process of integrating children into the marketplace. Gunter and Furnham provide an excellent psychological analysis of the young consumer entitled *Children as Consumers* (1998) in which they detail the nature of the children's market and their role as consumers. McNeal's *Kids as Customers: A Handbook of Marketing to Children* (1992) and more recently *On Becoming a Consumer: The Development of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Childhood* (2007) look at how children develop as consumers. Ellen Seiter's (1993) treatise on the children's toy market, *Sold Separately: Mothers and Children in Consumer Culture*, focuses on children's creative use of consumer goods and media. David Buckingham in *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (2000) looks at children and the media environment at the start of the century, a theme developed with Rebekah Willett in their (2006) edited text *Digital Generations*. In contrast to this academic approach, Martin Lindstrom and Patricia Seybold (2003) offer a practitioner's perspective on global kids in *Brand Child* looking at contemporary market research with young consumers.

But as an interest in marketing to children grew so too did concerns over the way in which this was developing. Stephen Kline's excellent history of marketing to children, *Out of the Garden* (1993), maps out a detailed historical trajectory of children's play culture and the role of the mass media in building up the 'children's' market. His account ten years later of the development of new media in *Digital Play* (Kline et al., 2003) reveals the emerging relationship between technology, culture and marketing in the games and video industry. Susan Linn's (2004) *Consuming Kids* and Juliet Schor's (2004) *Born to Buy* both raised important questions over this increasingly commercialised world of childhood and the pervasive nature of marketing. More recently the UK National Consumer Council's (Nairn et al., 2007) study on materialism and marketing towards children concluded that children who spend more time in front of the television or computer tend to be more materialistic and have lower self-esteem, raising further concerns over the impact of marketing to younger consumers. Mayo and Nairn's (2009) *Consumer Kids: How Big Business is Grooming our Children for Profit*⁴ leaves little doubt as to the sentiment of the text. They provide an insightful account of the latest marketing tactics and the impact on children's wellbeing⁵ in an increasingly commercial world and also look at some of the positive ways in which children are responding to this consumer world.

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A large part of the debate on marketing to children has focused on advertising, primarily in relation to mass media advertising and the ways in which children engage with television and, more recently, on-line advertising. Research from over thirty years ago showed that children's ability to distinguish between persuasive advertising and television programmes was related to age (Robertson and Rossiter, 1974). While some would argue that children lack the life skills and experience to resist the persuasive nature of commercial advertising others claim that promotional messages provide information to allow for informed choice (Moore, 2004). Inherent in this debate is the idea that advertising to children is 'unfair' and one approach has been to look for the 'magic age' at which children can understand the persuasive intent of these commercial messages. While it has commonly been assumed that teenagers are less vulnerable to advertising, recent research suggests that they may be just as persuadable as younger children when it comes to digital marketing. The persuasion model relies on explicit mental processes and does not account for the formation of implicit attitudes when children encounter certain stimuli (Livingstone and Helsper, 2006; Nairn and Fine, 2008). Today's children are faced with a variety of new media where the distinctions between commercial and non commercial material are increasingly blurred, for example, when advergames promote brands on line (Moore and Rideout, 2007; Lee et al., 2009). For this generation, television advertising represents only one aspect of their consumption experience and more recent accounts have considered their engagement with a broader range of media including the internet (Livingstone and Helsper, 2004; Tufte et al., 2005; Schor, 2006; Ekström and Tufte, 2007; Livingstone, 2009).

As we ponder on the impact of advertising campaigns on children, few ask if younger children are actually interested in these ever more devious advertising campaigns or how they relate to them, and most importantly how they impact on their behaviour (Andersen, 2007). While most of the discussion around marketing to children has centred on exposure and the comprehension of commercial intent, we know much less about how children utilize that information and the impact on their behaviour (Lawlor and Prothero, 2002; Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003). In a rapidly changing media environment we might also ask how children have learnt to deal with marketing as a consequence of this increased exposure to products and brands and try to understand that experience from their perspective.

Children and consumption

Over a twenty year period from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, young consumer spending in the USA increased from \$2bn to \$6bn and their

influence extended to a staggering \$132bn of household expenditure (McNeal, 1992). This trend was to continue through the 1980s in the United States with an increasingly affluent teenage market, despite numbers of teenagers declining by 15.5 per cent (Gunter and Furnham 1998: 2; see also Davis, 1990; McNeal, 1992). By the end of the 1990s it was estimated that children in the USA accounted for \$23bn in direct spending, almost all of this discretionary, and influenced a further \$188bn in family purchases (McNeal, 1999). Ten years on the children's market (i.e. the annualised amount spent on child related goods and activities) is around \$921bn⁶ in the United States. The corresponding value of the UK market is around £117 bn.⁷

The most recent account of children's direct purchasing power in the USA is around \$51.8bn (Schor, 2006). It is difficult to get similar figures for the UK but the most recent British pocket money survey from the Halifax⁸ showed the following:

- Average pocket money in 2008 was £6.13 per week, versus £8.01 in 2007.
- Younger children aged between 8 and 11 years old got almost half the amount of their older counterparts (12 to 15 years old) receiving £4.34.
- Pocket money was out of step with inflation – there was a shortfall of £3.30 for 2008's weekly allowance compared with three years beforehand.
- Whilst parents provided a weekly allowance they continued to pay for mobiles, ipods and gifts.
- Three in ten children saved some of their pocket money each week; however if they wanted something in addition to their allowance they tended to ask for it as a 'present' (Halifax, 2008).

With an estimated 11.5 million children aged under sixteen in the UK (Social Trends, 2009), and around 70 per cent receiving pocket money, this represents considerable spending power that does not include money gifted to children or the cash they earn for part-time jobs or individual enterprise. The (2009) *ChildWise Monitor Report*⁹ found 84 per cent of UK children aged 5 to 16 years old received a regular income, with 72 per cent receiving pocket money or an allowance and a quarter earning income from a paid job. Average weekly income was £10.10, with children aged 5 to 10 years old getting around £4.70 per week on average and 11 to 16 year olds receiving £12.10 each. This gives a total value of children's annual income of £3800m,¹⁰ with a further estimated £5100m in ad hoc handouts including birthday money. Taken together this represents a combined annual figure of £8900m per year (covering pocket money, allowances, paid jobs and ad-hoc handouts) at children's disposal.

James McNeal (1987, 1992, 1999) discusses this potentially lucrative market of young consumers spending their money on a range of items such as confectionary, drinks, toys, fast food, magazines, movies and music and influencing family spending¹¹ (directly and indirectly) on products as diverse as breakfast cereals, family cars and holidays. The (2008) *ChildWise*

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Report gave an average annual self spend for the UK's 5 to 16 year olds of £310m on crisps and snacks, £290m on soft drinks, £260m on sweets and chocolate, £1090m on clothing, £440m on music and CDs, and £340m on computer software – a grand total across these categories of £2730m. In a number of these areas children are seen as having their own 'needs' and also a willingness to spend money on such products, but to constitute a market they also need to have the ability and the authority to purchase, as well as some knowledge and understanding of that market.

This idea of a 'children's market' is a relatively new development in 'western' markets and up to the 1960s children were not seen as customers in their own right but as savers and future customers. While most of the focus has been on children's direct and indirect influence on family purchases, from breakfast cereals through to cars, an increasing number of products and promotions are being targeted directly at children. This has led to debates around pester power and persuasive kids, raising concerns over the ways in which this commercialization of childhood is impacting on family life (Wooton, 2003; Carauna and Vasello, 2004; Preston, 2004; Spungin, 2004). However, more recent views suggest that parent-child relationships are less confrontational and more collaborative in contemporary western societies. Finally, children are important as a future market for most goods and services and one to be cultivated early. Consider children's savings accounts offered by most banks, or children's food ranges on the supermarket shelves, or a British advert that reverses the parent-child role and has the kids commenting on the versatility of the family orientated MPV. No wonder that the relevant companies are interested.

One measure of this interest in the children's market is in the amount spent on advertising products to children. A (2007) report for the Advertising Association in the UK reported a 9 per cent (£26m) fall in advertising expenditure on confectionery, potato crisps and snacks, full sugar carbonates (fizzy drinks), breakfast cereals and fast food restaurants between 2003 and 2006. In the same period there was a corresponding 61 per cent increase in expenditure on fruit juice, water, and fresh fruit and vegetables (albeit from a low base). The same report shows a fall of 29 per cent in the number of core category ads (all food, fast food and confectionary) watched by 4 to 9 year olds in the immediate period following the introduction of restrictions on UK advertising. From 1 January 2009 there was to be no advertising of high fat, sugar, or salt food products on children's TV channels. Yet advertising in other media (such as on-line) appears to be taking hold (Lee et al., 2009; Mayo and Nairn, 2009). In the USA, advertising aimed at children is estimated at \$15 billion annually (Linn, 2004). The Kaiser Family Foundation (2006, 2007) found food to be the most widely advertised product on the networks in their study. Almost half of the ads on kids' time television were for food products and the vast majority of those brands also had an on-line presence with websites using a variety of marketing tactics.

Children as consumers

However, this book is not simply about the size of the market or indeed what marketing does to children, but about children as consumers. It looks at what children do with marketing (as consumers of the advertising, promotions and products they are exposed to) and their consumption experiences. While marketers propose a view of children as relatively autonomous individuals making independent decisions, policy groups are more likely to see children in need of protection. This book stands outside those opposing adult views and looks at consumption from the child's perspective. More specifically, it presents the views of a number of leading experts in the field about children as consumers, and one that is *sympathetic* to the idea of looking at consumption from the child's perspective, despite the limited amount of research that adopts this approach. There has been a considerable body of work within the field of marketing that seeks to explore and examine the consumption practices of children, in many cases looking at ideas that have been applied to adult consumers and adapting them accordingly, but in all of this debate there remains a question around the extent to which children should be treated differently from adults.

A number of themes – besides the vulnerable-competent issue – emerge over the course of the book. One such theme is consumer socialization and the extent to which children are integrated into consumption practices either as individuals or as members of a family. Socialization assumes that children are in some form of liminal state and childhood is part of a transition into adulthood, encapsulated in the idea of children as 'becomings'. But as we will see, there is some interest in children as consumers in their own right – as 'beings' – and a need to understand what consumption means to them. This transition and development theme is reflected in the cognitive development literature which has played an important role in how we approach children's consumption. This is evident across a number of chapters and references to the work of Piaget and Roedder John appear throughout the text.

How we choose to conduct research with children as consumers is beginning to change and throughout the book there is increasing evidence of interpretivist approaches, the use of projective techniques, and looking at children's consumption from a consumer culture theory (CCT) perspective. These new ways of looking at young consumers are evident in a number of the chapters. Another theme to emerge is the issue of ethics, particularly around the growth in materialism and consumption among young children and the role that marketing plays in this development.

Finally, one cannot help but notice the impact of new mobile and internet technologies. Social networking sites, blogs, online gaming, advergames and web 2.0 are connecting consumers and creating new forms of dialogue between young consumers and companies. Increasingly companies are

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marketing through these new media channels as well as via the traditional media of television and print. This is an area that has drawn the attention of a number of researchers interested in how children engage with this new media. Evidence from the UK showed that young people (7 to 16 year olds) are engaged with a range of interactive and non interactive media. Many have internet access at home, a mobile phone, games consoles and a television in their rooms¹² (ChildWise, 2008). Children spend twice as much time in front of the screen as they do in class (Mayo and Nairn, 2009).

Organization of the book

There are four sections and 14 chapters in the book (see Figure 1). Each chapter has a set of objectives and includes short examples that illustrate the issues discussed within, along with some discussion questions at the end of the chapter. The book is organized around the idea of children being actively engaged in the commercial marketplace and begins by looking at some of the ways in which we have conceptualized children as consumers, drawing on psychological and sociological models of childhood. These serve as the background for some of the ways in which children's marketing has evolved in response to the shift from 'cute to cool' and the role of branding, advertising and retailing in shaping their consumption experiences and engaging them as consumers, both directly and indirectly. Developments in marketing towards children force us to rethink some of our ideas around how they function and engage as consumers in the marketplace and this feeds back into our debate around development and socialization. The third section looks at a number of the products that are associated with young consumers, notably snacks, clothes, and the internet, as areas of consumption where they exercise some discretion. These represent specific examples of marketing to children that resonate with developments in Part II, but they also raise issues about children's abilities as consumers and their agency in certain categories of consumption. This leads into the final sections that reflect on the moral aspects of these changes and conclude by revisiting the question of whether children are competent or vulnerable beings in a marketplace that is increasingly orientated towards them as consumers. In the end, these questions force us to reflect on, or rethink, the ways in which we look at children as consumers.

Contributors

This book is an edited collection with contributions from a number of international researchers actively engaged in theoretical and empirical work on the consumption practices of children. Contributions from Europe,

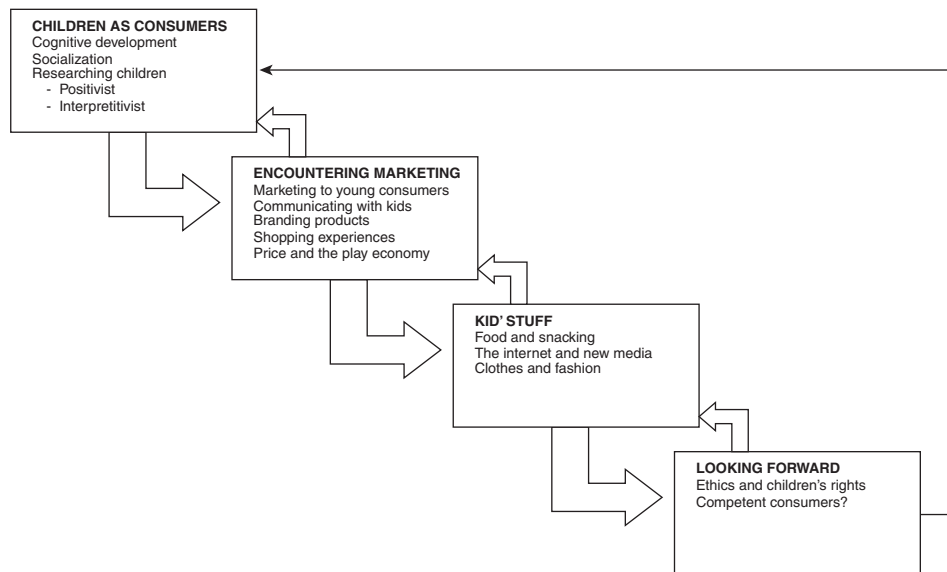


Figure 1 Understanding children as consumers

Scandinavia, North America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia offer a contemporary view of child consumers in developed western economies and provide valuable insights into different aspects of children's consumption. This is a rich and emergent field attracting a range of disciplines from business, commerce, and management through to other social science fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, education and history, and the text looks beyond children and advertising to consider how they engage and interact with consumption more broadly. There are clearly questions over children's competencies as consumers and the various contributors revisit the contemporary view of children as passive consumers. The book provides readers with a basis for looking at various aspects of children's consumption, supplemented with cutting-edge research insights that contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which children interact, respond and engage with marketing-related activities.

Part I looks at 'Children as Consumers' and has contributions from experts in the field of marketing to children. In Chapter 2 Valérie-Inés de la Ville and Valérie Tartas look at the contribution from three development psychology perspectives on understanding children as consumers. They offer a considered and insightful critique of the theoretical cognitive development frameworks that have informed much of our research into children as consumers and argue for the need to consider children's development as consumers as a function of environmental influences. They also look at some of the ways in which children acquire social skills through their interaction with others and

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offer a framework that brings together these ideas and recognizes the active nature of children's consumption and the role of the environment and socialization in shaping their cognitive development. For de la Ville and Tartas, children are very much active participants in the marketplace and they examine the ways in which they develop as economic actors in a complex cultural system that both enables and constrains their consumption activities. They challenge us to consider how children move from being peripheral to central participants in consumption. This chapter offers an excellent review and critique of the dominant approach to understanding children as consumers and argues convincingly for the need to consider critically what this tells us about children as consumers.

The third chapter by Karin Ekström picks up on this theme of consumer socialization within the specific context of the family, an important site of consumer socialization and one that appears throughout the book. Ekström looks at the mediating influence of the family unit and the extent to which this plays an important role in transferring and transforming children's consumption experiences. But she rejects this unidirectional, one-sided view and sees this process not simply as one where parents influence children but as a much more dyadic interaction whereby children can influence and change what their parents, and grandparents, consume through their provision of knowledge. In this respect children are much more agentive and can influence certain aspects of family consumption. In discussing this process of socialization, Ekström looks at the dualistic perspective of children as either competent or vulnerable and argues, like de la Ville and Tartas, for the need to look at this in a broader environmental context – not least in terms of developments in communication technologies, especially with the emergence of web space and social networking sites that have been enthusiastically adopted by young consumers. She offers ten different family types, derived from her own research, and considers a range of consumption scenarios that explore socialization in contemporary Swedish families. The chapter reveals the extent to which children's influence depends on the nature of family communication, supporting other research in this area. And what she shows, through this, is a relationship between influence and affluence, raising issues around socioeconomic differences in the socialization of young consumers.

The challenge of researching young consumers is taken up by Teresa Davis. She discusses the methodological and ethical challenges in undertaking this type of research and offers an insightful and pragmatic approach to understanding children's consumption, drawing on both positivistic – which has dominated much of the consumer research with children – and more recent interpretative approaches. She considers the appropriateness as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Davis recognizes the extent to which the selection of a research method is dependent on a researcher's ontological perspective, with positivist approaches commonplace

among the cognitive developmentalists and interpretivist approaches emerging in the field of sociology. In particular, she argues for the need to rethink our approach to the child as subject and how that impacts on our research method. The chapter provides an excellent guide to doing research with young children and offers a series of 'dos' and 'don'ts' that serve to guide researchers in either the positivist or interpretivist tradition. She draws on a range of contemporary studies of children and brands to illustrate the different approaches currently used in academic research to understand how children categorize and classify their own consumption. Positivist approaches include categorization and choice tasks, using shopping scripts, or simplifying and modifying research instruments. Interpretivists are utilizing projective techniques to look to unpack some of the complexity that lies beyond the surface response. Projective techniques covered in the chapter include drawing, online research methods, and using photography and comic book approaches. The chapter offers a balanced view on how to conduct research with young consumers and introduces some exciting new developments in how we conduct the research that will be of interest to both academics and practitioners alike.

Part II, entitled 'Encountering Marketing', has contributions from academics looking specifically at how children engage with marketing. It looks at marketing toys, branding aimed at children, advertising and promoting to children, how children engage in shopping, and ideas about how they experience money. Chapter 5, by Gary Cross, offers a fascinating historical perspective in the marketing of toys to children in the USA. He is less receptive to the idea of asking children about what they consume and provides an alternative approach that considers the changing nature of the children's market over time, drawing on historical accounts and archive material of the children's toy market. He notes the relatively recent emergence of the children's market and the manner in which the marketing of toys has changed since the 1900s. With the emergence of the 'wonderous child' comes a celebration of the 'cute' and the first appearance of the child-centered holiday. Just as Ekström comments on children's influence across generations, so Cross notes the way in which nostalgia became part of the marketing around toys and the cross-generational 'retro' appeal linking parents and children. In contrast, the marketing of 'cool' as a rebellion against a parental imposition of the cute emerged in the early part of the twentieth century and saw the appearance of toy figures and paraphernalia based on media figures and fantasy characters. Marketing toys to children, especially boys, began to take on a new guise – aided and abetted by an emerging children's media in the form of movies, the radio, comic books and television. Girls are not immune to this influence and the arrival of the Barbie doll, and more latterly Bratz, saw a corresponding shift from cute to cool down to the tween market, something which Cross suggests we might look at more closely. His chapter illustrates the value of looking historically at what is happening in the children's market today.

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Agnes Nairn takes this idea of branding and looks at how children relate to and use brands as part of their everyday existence in Chapter 6. She shows how brands and exposure to the commercial world are an integral part of contemporary childhood. Children are already familiar with brands of confectionary, clothing, and music and software at a young age. Like a number of other authors she is critical of the developmental perspective and argues that any understanding of how children use brands, as opposed to simply learning about them, requires us to consider other approaches. She turns to consumer culture theory (CCT) for an explanation into the ways in which brands are used, by young consumers, as part of their individual and group narrative. Like Cross she talks about the importance of 'cool' and looks at the central role of brands in this process. Drawing on her own research Nairn looks at the possessions and brands that matter to children by talking directly to them. In the process she finds that these brands are heavily marketed toward children across a range of media and marketing channels that extend far beyond the realm of television advertising. She unpacks some of the complexity in 'cool' and highlights the active and participative nature of children's engagement with brands that they deem relevant and meaningful. Once again Barbie appears but this time the complaints are coming from the children not the parents – she is no longer 'cool'. Brands appear to be a central part of gender and class identity but a key contribution of this chapter is the discussion around consumption and materialism. It appears that marketers are more astute and innovative in their on-line promotional activities and Nairn suggests that we pay close attention to developments in this area.

One area that has been under particular scrutiny is advertising to children, and in Chapter 7 Brian Young looks critically at this aspect of marketing. He outlines some of the anxieties around advertising to children and examines the ways in which children process this information by looking at materialism and obesity in young consumers. Young's chapter is firmly located in a developmental mode and he offers a Piagetian perspective on advertising that considers different cognitive developmental stages. He revisits the argument around informative and persuasive intent and in looking back at a classic study raises interesting questions about the nature of contemporary children's engagement in a much more cluttered world of marketing and media aimed directly at them. Young finds some evidence of media literacy in children around the ages of between 6 and 9 years old, but as he notes this understanding of advertising does not mean there is no effect on children's consumption. He goes on to suggest that there is a trajectory of development sequences through which children learn to understand advertising. However, Young is the first to recognize the danger of only looking at advertising and acknowledges that this is only one of a range of factors that have come to influence children's consumption. Like a number of authors he also argues that children are more actively engaged, and dismissive, of this medium than we may have given them credit for in the past. He picks up and

develops this idea of materialism and childhood from a developmental perspective. He then finishes off with an examination of one of the most sensitive, and controversial, aspects of marketing – the promotion and advertising of fast food to children. Young offers an interesting perspective on this relationship between advertising and obesity in young people that suggests we may be looking in the wrong place for an explanation of childhood obesity, but the jury remain out on this.

In Chapter 8 Julie Tinson and Clive Nancarrow look at children and shopping. They are interested in how children behave in the context of the family unit but their focus is on the nature of the decision process and the role of children in this. Like Ekström they find evidence of the dyadic nature of the parent-child interaction in certain types of family units, in this case single parent, blended and intact units. They see children as more actively engaged in the decision process as opposed to being passive recipients. Their specific focus is on 8 and 12 year olds' involvement in family decision making. Tinson and Nancarrow are interested in the various stages of this decision process in relation to both the product and the age of the child. The authors discuss different types of family decision making, conveying the range of different approaches that may be adopted both within and across family units. What is clear from their account is that children are being included and are more directly engaged in a number of family decisions. Although the options and opportunities for their involvement are likely to be limited, children often believe the process to be more democratic than it is. Tinson and Nancarrow explore and unpack this idea of consumer savvy in relation to children, drawing us back towards the broader issue of whether children are vulnerable or competent in their shopping encounters.

This issue of becoming consumers and competence is further developed in the discussion around children and money by Christine Roland-Lévy in Chapter 9. She focuses on children's experiences with economic aspects of consumption and looks at how children acquire and manage their financial resources. Centering on economic socialization, she describes the process by which children acquire the skills and competencies that are relevant to the economic world. Like de la Ville and Tartas, she draws on both cognitive development and social learning theories to explore this aspect of consumption and outlines some of the differentiating factors that contribute to this learning process. In the process she argues for a need to look at what she calls the 'real economic behaviour' of children and the 'play-economy'. She reports on cross cultural research into young children's understanding of relatively complex financial issues, such as taxation and savings versus credit, highlighting some of the social and cultural differences in relation to their economic socialization. Roland-Lévy is sensitive to the specific research challenges of understanding this aspect of children's behaviour and the chapter illustrates some of the issues in this specific area of research.

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Part III, entitled 'Kids' Stuff', looks at three key areas of children's consumption of food, fashion and the internet (toys are examined in the previous section). In Chapter 10, David Marshall and Stephanie O'Donohoe discuss the emergence of a distinctive children's food culture and growing concerns over what children are eating in an increasingly obesogenic environment populated with the marketing of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt. Yet amidst this debate they examine the issue of fun food and consider children's ideas about snacking as part of their everyday food experiences and the extent to which this needs to be seen in relation to the overall family food system. They talk about the nature of the family meal occasion and report on research with children from Scotland, New Zealand and Canada in relation to eating at home. They explore children's own accounts of snacking and question the importance of food advertising in children's food preferences, echoing some of the ideas presented by Young in Chapter 7. They find some evidence of discretionary consumption, but argue that despite some of the concerns around snacking much of young children's food consumption continues to be mediated by parents rather than manipulated by marketing messages and advertising. Finally, they argue that food consumption offers an excellent opportunity to observe and understand various aspects of children's consumption behaviours.

In Chapter 11 Birgitte Tufte and Janette Rasmussen consider what has become one of the most contested aspects of children's consumption, the internet. They outline the emergence of the global high speed network and the more recent development of social networking sites before drawing on their research with Danish children into the relationship between media use and consumption. The authors highlight the increasing gulf between children and parents along with the differential use between boys and girls. The chapter provides valuable insights into how children are engaging with this virtual environment and contrasts the differences between internet use at home and in schools. Tufte and Rasmussen show how the emergence of new forms of media serve as a vehicle for marketing to children and outline some of the concerns around the commercialization of these new communication channels, echoing broader concerns over young people's media use. In an area of consumption where children are generally seen as more 'being' than 'becoming', they illustrate some of the complexity surrounding the ways in which children interact with and utilize this new form of media and how they engage with marketing activities on line.

Maria Piacentini looks at children's ideas about clothing brands and fashion in Chapter 12, locating her discussion in the literature of symbolic consumption and self-identity and self-expression. She looks at the role that fashion and clothing play in young consumers' lives and how these are closely bound to ideas about the self and peer group influence. She critically examines the role of marketing and the fashion system in shaping choice and considers how clothing styles and brands allow young consumers to

simultaneously pursue individual identities and create social distinctions that mark their place within a youth subculture. She considers the inherent social and cultural capital in this very visible and public consumption good. Piacentini looks at rituals surrounding fashion and unpacks some of the contextual aspects and the increasingly 'adultification' of children's fashion that touches on broader issues around marketing to children. The chapter lends some support to the socialisation thesis but reveals some important differences in perspective between young consumers and adults in relation to fashion and clothing consumption.

The final part of the book, 'Looking Forward', considers some of the moral issues surrounding marketing to children and brings us back to the broader debate around marketing to children and how they, as consumers, respond to this commercial activity. Sarah Todd, in looking at the ethics of marketing to children, returns to the question of age and cognitive development in relation to young consumers' understanding of persuasive intent in marketing activities. She notes that a scepticism about marketing is an insufficient basis on which to argue that children are any less susceptible to marketing influences. Building on this idea, Todd examines children's rights and the relevant codes of ethics applying to those who research children. She picks up on the ill effects of marketing and most notably the growth of consumption and materialism in the young – a recurrent theme throughout this book – discussing the symbolic role of brands in building an emotional attachment among the young, particularly in relation to fitting in with peer groups. As the trend towards more direct marketing to children changes the family dynamic, she raises ethical questions around pester power and the changing nature of family socialization. As marketing initiatives – on the internet, mobile media, and even in schools – creates a series of new challenges and evokes calls for increased regulation and monitoring, she argues that those companies targeting children need to consider the ethical implications involved.

In the final chapter, Stephen Kline picks up on this central debate about children as competent or vulnerable consumers and develops his argument around the issue of food and childhood obesity in what is seen as an increasingly risk adverse society. He explores this idea from the perspective of the moral panic that endures in contemporary public debate and discusses the role of the media in this positioning of children as vulnerable consumers in need of protection. As the industry builds its counter arguments, he illustrates how this question of children's competencies as consumers in the mediated marketplace begins to take central stage in the debate. As he notes, this question of competencies revolves around three key issues of advertising and media literacy, consumer literacy, and economic literacy. Kline looks at each of these in detail and argues for our need to remain vigilant in an increasingly sophisticated communication environment. While it is apparent that children are actively engaged in the market there remain questions over

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their marketplace literacy, and this chapter raises a number of important issues in relation to children as consumers.

In summary, this text offers a comprehensive and insightful overview of various aspects of children's consumption and their role as consumers. As the children's market grows in importance, we need to more fully understand their role as consumers both in terms of ensuring that they are adequately equipped to deal with the changing market and that any marketing addresses their specific needs and vulnerabilities. As the various chapters show, there is no clear answer to the question of whether children are either vulnerable or competent; the truth, if it exists, seems to lie somewhere between the two. That is not to say that we should not continue to regulate, monitor and legislate where appropriate, but it recognizes that we need to give children some credit as consumers. In looking at children as consumers it is easy to forget that we are adults and what may seem trite, fickle or unimportant to us may take on a different meaning to a young consumer. Debates around media literacy, marketplace competencies, or even specific aspects of consumption such as nutritional literacy are all attempts to address some of these issues, but from a policy perspective how we move forward depends very much on whether we start from a position of seeing children as vulnerable or competent. Hopefully this book will help readers to decide on where they stand in relation to young consumers. The title of the book, *Understanding Children as Consumers*, hints at new ideas about children as engaged and active consumers in the marketplace.

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Notes

- 1 Much of the discussion in the book centres around children under 12 and excludes infants. A number of chapters focus on tweens i.e. those between 7 and 12 years old.
- 2 Dan Cook (2004: 3) uses the term 'pediocularity' to describe the situation where the child's view is represented and adjudicated by commerce.
- 3 But with that comes some responsibility. If we are to allow children to 'choose', if we consider them as competent and capable, we have to live with the consequences. Treating them as consumers is not without risk but there are differing degrees of choice and debate around what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable consequences.
- 4 However, industry is beginning to fight back. A report for the Advertising Association, entitled 'Children's wellbeing in a commercial world', found no evidence of a decline in children's overall wellbeing, arguing that in certain aspects it had actually enhanced the wellbeing of children (AA, 2009: see also Clay, 2008).
- 5 The advertising industry has responded and recent reports found limited evidence of a decline in children's wellbeing over the past fifteen years (Advertising Association, 2007, 2009; Clay, 2008). However, there are concerns over the measure of self-esteem and the analysis used, and for this reason the reports are not cited in the text (personal communication, Agnes Nairn).
- 6 This follows the procedure used by Mayo and Nairn (2009) to estimate the size of the children's market including all purchases directly related to raising children but excluding additional family purchases that children may influence. Data from the US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008/tabC2-all.csv>) show 74.014 million children under 18 in US households. Figures from the USDA Expenditure on Children by Families 2006 report (<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/CRC/crc2006.pdf#xml=http://65.216.150.153/texis/search/pdfhi.txt?query=dependent+children+numbers&pr=CNPP&prox=page&rorder=500&rprox=500&rdfreq=500&rwfreq=500&rlead=500&rdepth=0&sufs=2&order=r&cq=&id=49a59efdd>) estimate the total

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cost of raising a child from birth to 17 years in husband-wife families is \$143,790 (Before-tax income: Less than \$44,500); \$197,700 (Before-tax income: \$44,500 to \$74,900); and \$289,380 (Before-tax income: More than \$74,900). In single person households this is \$136,200 (Before-tax income: Less than \$44,500) and \$289,740 (Before-tax income: \$44,500 or more). If we average these out at \$211,362 this represents an average of \$12,433 per year. Using the population figures this represents a children's market of around \$921bn.

- 7 Data from the UK ONS (2009) Social trends 39, 15 April, (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_social/Social_Trends39/Social_Trends_39.pdf) show 13 million dependent children under 16 years old living with at least one parent in the UK. Data from the Liverpool Victoria Annual Cost of a Child Survey 2009 (http://www.lv.com/media_centre/press_releases/lv=%20cost%20of%20a%20child) estimate that it costs £194,000 to raise a child from birth to 21. This represents £9,227 a year. As average annual costs vary over a child's life and costs tend to be higher from 19–21 years old an estimate of £9,000 was made from birth to 16, to cover the ONS definition of dependent children. This gives a figure of around £117bn. This represents an increase of 4 per cent on previous estimates with cost up almost 40 per cent over the previous five years since the survey started.
- 8 Halifax Bank of Scotland (HBOS) is now part of the Lloyds Banking Group plc.
- 9 Many thanks to Rosmary Duff of ChildWise for these latest figures. The full report can be seen at <http://www.childwise.co.uk/contact-childwise.asp>
- 10 ChildWise is an established market research and marketing strategy agency which specializes in research with children. The ChildWise Monitor is a comprehensive annual report on children's and teenagers' media consumption, brand attitudes and behaviour, now in its fifteenth year. ChildWise estimate that 82 per cent of 5–10 year olds receive £5.70 p.w. (= £4.70 each/all children) which translates to £19.4 million per week; 86 per cent of 11–16 year olds receive £14.10 p.w. (= £12.10 each/all children) which translates to £54.3 million per week.
- 11 Generation Y, those born between 1982 and 2000, represent around 80 million US consumers and have a major impact on family spending. They are more affluent as in many cases both their parents work and they have higher expectations. As co-purchasers in family spending they contribute to family decisions about cars, clothes, electronic equipment and family holidays (<http://couponing.about.com/b/2006/10/16/youth-influences-half-of-consumer-spending.htm>).
- 12 See also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7837848.stm>