

TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

DEPRIVATION AND THE RATIONAL-EMOTIONAL BRIDGE

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INTRODUCTION

Technology has had a tremendous impact on the lives of kids and families over the past ten years. One need not be a skilled researcher to observe the growing prevalence of portable wireless devices such as mobile phones, gaming systems, and Mp3 players among even the youngest children in their daily activities. Whether in-home or on the go, technological advances have dramatically influenced individuals' methods of interacting with each other, access to information, and entertainment options, to name a few. Not only has the number of media outlets grown, but the number of choices within a given medium has increased as well. Given this recent expansion in the number of available media choices, understanding behavioral decision-making in leisure time has become especially important.

This paper draws from a major research initiative undertaken by Nickelodeon's Brand & Consumer Insights Group in the fall of 2006. Nickelodeon, the preeminent children's media brand and central pillar within MTV Networks' Kids & Family Division, has provided entertainment for children across the globe for more than 28 years. Originally a television network, Nickelodeon has expanded off-screen as well, to include a host of branded experiences across a variety of devices, such as gaming consoles, wireless mobile gadgets, and of course, the internet. In addition, the company's focus has recently broadened beyond kids to include families as a unit, thus creating opportunities for brand extensions which engage parents as well as their children. Understanding the nature of consumers' use of different media delivery systems is an ongoing priority for Nickelodeon, as the brand seeks to maintain a presence wherever these

audiences go, and in as many relevant activities as these audiences may choose to participate.

The goal of this research study was to explore kids' and parents' relationship to a variety of media and technology platforms, including television, the internet, cell phones, and video game systems. Unlike typical media studies on technology, this project went beyond the measurement of access and usage; specifically, the key objective was to uncover the underlying motivations for choosing to use different devices, and the benefits of using them, particularly given the variety of entertainment and leisure time choices available to kids and their parents.

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER CHOICE

One way in which researchers have conceptualized consumer choice is to view it as a function of the attributes of available products, the consequences associated with their use, the context of their use, and the values attained by their use (Reynolds and Olson, 2001). An important contribution made by Reynolds and Olson (2001) is to recognize that, in fact, choices are always between alternative *behaviors*, as opposed to objects. "*By recognizing that consumers choose among behaviors, not objects, decision-making research is placed in context because behaviors always occur in an environmental context*".¹ In this particular instance, we assumed that the choice of different media (and their associated attributes) activates different values and goals for each individual.

Reynolds and Olson (2001) base their understanding of consumer choice on the *means-ends approach* to understanding decision-making.

“The means-end process starts with the attributes that are important to consumers. The means-end approach implies that product attributes, per se, have little or no importance or relevance to consumers. Instead, attributes have meaning and value for consumers largely in terms of the consequences they are perceived to bring about. The end consequence in a means-end chain is often a personal goal or a life value the consumer is striving to achieve.”²

Consequences can be psychological, social, or functional, but the key is that they are what make the attributes personally relevant for consumers. These consequences are either positive or negative, and can be experienced or presumed based on past experience or knowledge. Values lie at the core of the means-end decision-making process, and are what differentiate this perspective from others used in conceptualized consumer decision-making processes. Values are the most stable, fundamental, and personally relevant parts of the chain.

This notion of consequences and values as the underlying forces in decision-making is also in line with what Zaltman (2003) refers to as *cognitive unconscious* – “the mental processes operating outside the consumer’s awareness that, together with conscious processes, create their experience of the world”.³ In other words, when choosing to use various media or tech devices, parents and kids are consistently activating past experiences and their subconscious values in order to make their choices. Realizing that we needed to tap into the cognitive unconscious of today’s parents and kids, the project, therefore, took an innovative approach to understanding the impact of technology of their lives.

THE DEPRIVATION DECISION

Traditional data collection methods are heavily reliant upon respondents’ ability to reflect on their own behavior and experiences, and then express these memories in a research context (Zaltman, 2003). In addition, conventional consumer research often expects respondents to be able to “articulate why they do the things they do” (Reynolds and Olson, 2001).⁴ However, if it is true, as Zaltman asserts, that “As much as 95% of

the thinking that drives human behavior occurs below the level of awareness,” then traditional methodologies would be of limited usefulness in this research effort, both for kids and parents. Beyond the “95-5 Split” (Zaltman, 2003), we hypothesized another reason why uncovering true motivations for and benefits of the use of different media and technology devices would prove to be difficult: the seamless integration of these platforms into the lives of most kids and their parents in the United States makes being able to step back and reflect on the role and influence of these media on everyday life very difficult. The ready access and the frequency with which these media are used further exacerbates the challenge of identifying the emotional connections that drive choice. Thus, we approached this research project with the assumption that true motivations and benefits for watching TV or using the computer, for example, are subconscious, and therefore require a non-traditional methodological approach.

Deprivation as a methodology is certainly not new to the social sciences. Indeed, there have even been numerous studies which explored different aspects of media deprivation, many capitalizing on involuntary deprivation conditions such as a New York newspaper strike in the 1940s (Berelson, 1949), and a 1980 labor strike in Sweden which reduced television programming to two daily newscasts (Windahl, Hojerback, and Hedinsson, 1986). Unlike most of these studies, however, the current research not only relied on voluntary deprivation, but also encompassed several different media platforms overall, and utilized multiple methodological approaches. In the rest of this paper we will take an in depth look at the effectiveness of deprivation as a research methodology and demonstrate through case study the critical added value that this approach brought to this research project.

LIVING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Research Design

The original research project, entitled “Living In a Digital World,” comprised an in-depth exploration of kids’ and parents’ use of a host of media platforms and devices,

including, but not limited to:

- Television
- Computers and the Internet
- Mobile Phones
- Video game players, both portable and console
- iPods and Mp3 Players

In addition, multiple methodologies were utilized. These are described below.

Friendship Pairs Discussions: Sixteen pairs of respondents, ranging in age from 7 to 15 years old, participated in dyad discussions designed to identify the values served by using different tech devices, as compared to values served by engaging in other kinds of leisure activities.

Traditional Focus Groups: Three focus group interviews were conducted among parents of kids aged 6 - 14 years in each of two U.S. markets. These included a total of four groups of parents who were heavy media and technology users, and two groups of moderate users.

Both of these traditional approaches were employed to inform the content and the language to be used in the quantitative research. Specifically, this qualitative research generated lists of expressed motivations for and benefits of using different media platforms. Researchers then combined these into one master list, which was integrated into surveys in order to quantify each one, and examine the relative value of these for each technology device that was addressed. Kids' and parents' master list of motivations and benefits is presented in table 1.

**TABLE 1
MASTER LIST OF MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS**

Kids	Parents
Helps you learn things	Helps you get things done
Keeps you from feeling left out	Lets you be more efficient
N/A	Lets you be more organized
Makes you feel like you've accomplished something	Makes you feel like you've accomplished something
Helps you feel smart	Makes you feel smart
Lets you feel good about yourself	Lets you feel good about yourself
Makes you feel helpful to other people	Lets you be more helpful to other people
	Gives you peace of mind
Lets you be more creative	Lets you be more creative
Makes you feel connected	Makes you feel connected
Gives you a sense of freedom	Gives you a sense of freedom
Lets you feel in charge or in control of things	Lets you feel in charge or in control
Makes you feel independent, like you can take care of yourself	Makes you less dependent on other people
Gives you more energy	Helps you feel more energized
Relaxes you or helps you wind down	Relaxes you or helps you wind down
Fills time	Fills time when you're bored
Helps you feel safe	Helps you feel safe
Gives you respect from your friends or family	Helps you feel respected by your friends or family
Helps you zone out or escape from stress	Lets you escape from your daily life

Telephone survey: Telephone surveys were conducted with 1,083 children aged 8-14 years, and 1,061 parents of kids aged 2-14 years. These respondent groups included a nationally representative sample of 475 kids, along with over-samples of 8-14 year-olds who were regular users of mobile phones, computers and the internet, television, Mp3 players, video game systems, digital video recorders (DVRs), and Video On Demand (VOD) services. The parents' sample was similarly recruited to reflect both national representation and frequent users of key media devices.

Deprivation Study: Finally, the fourth and arguably most critical component of the research design involved a multi-faceted deprivation study, which was fielding simultaneously with the telephone surveys. Children and parents (mothers, specifically) who were heavy users of television, video game players, cell phones (and wireless devices), and the internet agreed to give up the media platform for 10 consecutive days. Child and parent participants were from unique households, and each one gave up a single medium. In addition, there was an "all screen" condition which required participants to give up all video screens for 10 days. The full sample breakout is provided in Table 2.

Recognizing that this media derivation was voluntary, we had to rely on the kids and the moms to be vigilant *and* honest throughout the 10-day experiment. Several steps were taken to facilitate this honor system:

1. Recruited participants earned their incentive on a daily basis, not on a full project basis.
2. Researchers made a daily phone call to each participant, posing some standard questions, but otherwise simply checking in to see how they were getting along. At the end of each phone call, participants were asked if they wanted to end the deprivation at that point and receive their earned incentive to date, or if they wanted to continue with the project.
3. A toll-free number was created for the express use of these participants and/or their family members to call and vent, share anecdotes about the experience, seek clarification about the rules, or otherwise leave a message for whatever reason they desired. This, too, provided an easy means for which participants could opt out of the study at any time.

For research and presentation purposes, an in-depth in-home ethnography was conducted for at least one participant in each deprivation condition. For all other participants, pre-deprivation interviews were conducted via the telephone. At the conclusion of the 10-day deprivation, the children and the mothers gathered for condition-specific post-deprivation focus groups interviews. These discussions allowed the participants to finally meet their peers, and to share their experiences in a group format. Parents of the children who were involved in the deprivation were also convened on day 10 to reflect on their child's experience as well as the impact of the child's deprivation on the family.

**TABLE 2
DEPRIVATION SAMPLE BREAKOUT**

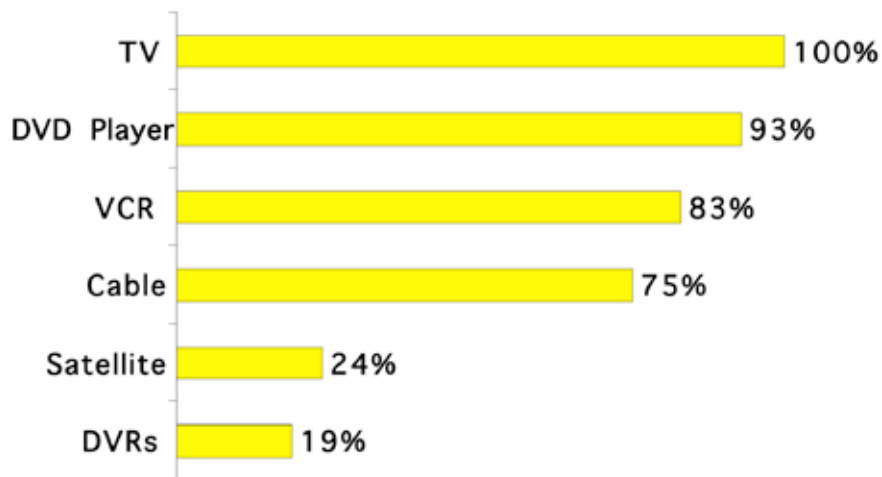
Deprivation Medium	Total Number of Children	Total Number of Mothers
Television	6	5
Internet	6	5
Cell Phones & Wireless Devices	6	5
Video Games	6	N/A
All Screens	12	1

KEY FINDINGS

The great majority of U.S. families have access to a host of media platforms and devices. Figures 1-4 present platform penetration and ownership levels among 6-14 year-olds and parents of kids aged 14 years and under in the United States. Consistent with findings reported by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2005), we found that the greater the access to the media platforms, the greater the usage of them. In addition, the findings demonstrate

the extent to which parents are adopting technology as effectively, if not more so, as kids are. While the nature of parents' usage may sometimes vary from that of 6-14 year olds (e.g., kids are significantly more likely than parents to use Instant Message services on the internet, and to download games and custom ring tones on their mobile phones), this generation of parents of kids 14 years and under is quite savvy with emerging technologies.

**FIGURE 1
TELEVISION & ACCESSORIES**



**FIGURE 2
GAME CONSOLES, COMPUTERS & ACCESSORIES**

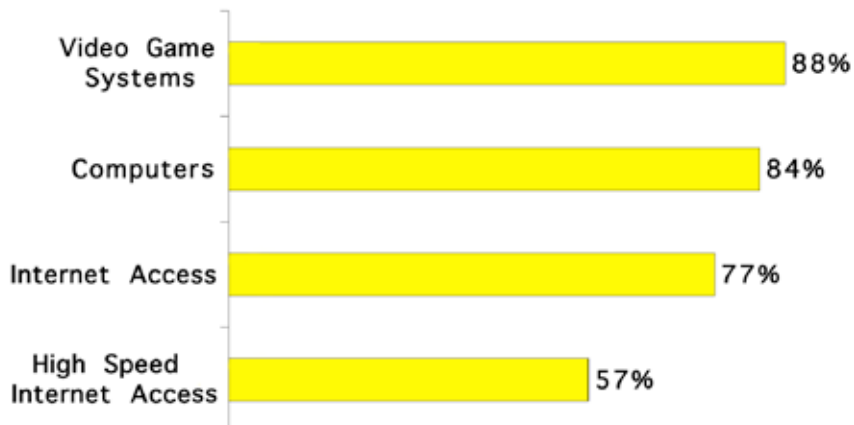


FIGURE 3
CELL PHONE OWNERSHIP

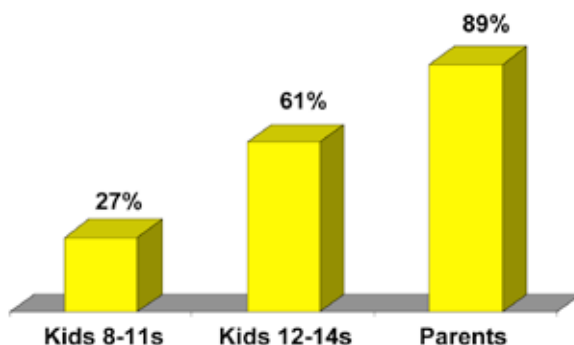
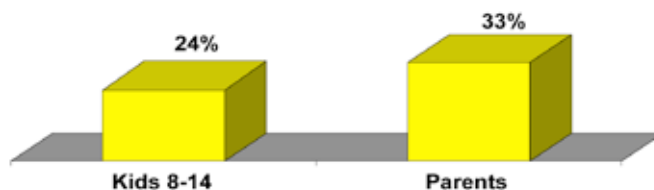


FIGURE 4
OWNERSHIP OF MP3 PLAYERS



Nevertheless, for both children and for parents, the findings suggest that the eight different devices and platforms we explored in this research project can generally be categorized into two broad groups: essentials and accessories. The essentials – namely, television, the internet, and mobile phones – are more closely aligned with consumers’ needs and priorities. Not surprisingly, access and usage of the essentials is very high; they allow kids and parents to meet the challenges they face in daily life, and as such make life easier. Accessories, on the other hand, are less critical to daily life. They are nice to have, and do enhance many consumers’ needs, albeit less critical needs. Penetration and usage of the accessories – including portable and console game systems, Mp3 players, digital video recorders, and On Demand video services – is generally lower than that of the accessories.

In the interest of focusing primarily on the methodological aspects of this project, we will not report all of the

findings from the study, but instead focus on the key motivations and benefits that arose for the Essential technologies (television, the Internet, and mobile phones).

MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS

Table 3 presents the list of the top five motivations and benefits for the three devices, and the percentages of respondents who endorsed them as especially relevant to their own experiences. For parents and kids today, it is clear that television is a source of escape and entertainment. Four of the key motivations and benefits for using television point to the power of this medium to create a space where kids and parents can put their daily worries aside:

- Relaxes you or helps you wind down
- Fills time
- Helps you zone out or escape from stress
- Lets you escape from your daily life

TABLE 3
TOP MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS FOR EACH “ESSENTIAL” DEVICE

	Kids	Parents
Television	Relaxes you or helps you wind down	Fills time when you're bored
	52%	69%
	Fills time	Relaxes you or helps you wind down
	49%	57%
	Helps you zone out or escape from stress	Lets you escape from daily life
	42%	48%
Helps you learn things	Makes you feel connected	
37%	25%	
Lets you be more creative	Lets you feel in charge, in control	
30%	18%	
Internet	Helps you learn things	Lets you be more efficient
	60%	61%
	Lets you be more creative	Helps you get things done
	51%	60%
	Fills time	Helps you feel connected
	50%	57%
Makes you feel connected	Fills time when you're bored	
36%	50%	
Relaxes you or helps you wind down	Lets you be more helpful to others	
32%	48%	
Mobile Phones	Makes you feel connected	Helps you feel connected
	57%	66%
	Helps you feel safe	Helps you feel safe
	52%	64%
	Gives you a sense of freedom	Lets you be more efficient
	40%	59%
Makes you feel independent, like you can take care of yourself	Helps you get things done	
35%	56%	
Makes you feel helpful to other people	Lets you be more helpful to others	
32%	49%	

In this instance, the deprivation study confirmed the importance of these motivations and benefits. Subjects in both the television and the all-screen deprivation conditions lamented the loss of television as their aid to decompressing. Said one 10-year-old boy, "TV relaxes me, like if I just got done with really hard homework, [TV] gets me less frustrated." However, lost in the survey data (and in the initial qualitative research) was the importance of television in bringing family members together. Moms who gave up television for 10 days recounted stories of the family dashing from the dinner table to watch television together, leaving her alone to fill the time in a different way. "There's some really good stuff on [TV]. A lot of it brings us together all in the same room where we would not normally be together." Kids, too, described feelings of sadness and isolation when the study kept them from being a part of family gatherings in front of the television. In many instances, these occasions were more about the shared experience of co-viewing with family than they were about the programming content itself. In addition, some respondents described the loss of intimacy which resulted from watching television together. For example, one mom whose 13-year-old son had given up television for 10 days reported that she recorded the program that she and her son usually watch together, and saved it until the deprivation was over as a way of preserving the experience. Similarly, a 10-year-old boy described his own experience of a loss of intimacy with his father: "In the mornings, I usually come and lay down with my dad and watch TV with him. [Today], I woke up later and just sat on the couch. It was boring."

Unlike television, parents' and kids' reported motivations for using the internet were not so similar. For parents, the internet is first and foremost about productivity and being connected with others. This was evident in both the quantitative data (see table 3) as well as moms' pre-deprivation interviews; all of these qualitative participants felt that the sense of being connected with their friends and extended family members, as well as the ready access to information, were what they expected to miss the most during the 10 day deprivation period.

The children, on the other hand, were most likely to report motivations and benefits of using the internet as a learning tool and a source of entertainment. Naturally, schoolwork was important in this regard, but so was general access to information. Filling time ranked as a key motivation for internet use for 50% of both parents and kids, and gaming is a big part of this for the younger demographic.

Internet deprivation evoked some of the most immediate and dramatic reactions from the kids who gave it up, the parents of the kids in the deprivation study, and the moms who were living without the medium. In the children's households, homework became an instant challenge, as neither the kids nor their parents realized how dependent they were upon the internet as a homework helper until it was taken away. In fact, the majority of the calls made to the deprivation hotline were homework-related, as both the kids and their parents questioned the rules in search of loopholes that would allow them to log on. However, these challenges were less about the internet's ability to inspire learning, and more about the convenience, efficiency, and time-saving nature of the internet. Parents complained about the inconvenience of the alternative – taking the participating child, and all of the younger siblings by necessity, to a public library to research *The Revolutionary War*, for example. Kids were frustrated by their own compromised autonomy and independence, as they were forced to involve their parents in their schoolwork.

The moms who lived without the internet for 10 reported a great deal of aggravation and irritation, much of it tied to their reported loss of self-sufficiency. Gone were the days of time-saving shortcuts and total independence. Instead, they were forced to ask for directions rather than replying on MapQuest, for example, locate and then go to the motor vehicles office to add money to a highway toll pass rather than simply increasing the value online – tasks that required the assistance of others. This deprivation experience helped the moms realize how much they value the sense of independence and control that comes from using the internet, attributes that ranked much lower on the list in the survey. In addition,

while nearly half (48%) of parent respondents agreed that the internet enabled them to be helpful to others, the deprivation experience allowed a couple of the mothers to realize the extent to which being the go-to person for information – be it discount travel opportunities or health-related information – for their friends and family had become an important part of their identity.

Safety and connectedness were the primary motivations and benefits behind mobile phone use for the majority of both kids and parents. In addition, general productivity was valued by many moms, while freedom and independence were important to many kids. Deprivation participants worried that they would be disconnected from their social circles, inconvenienced by unanticipated shopping requests from home (e.g., “I won’t be able to call my husband and remind him to stop at the dry cleaners”), and generally unreachable in case of an emergency.

Interestingly, the kids who gave up their mobile phones reported very few disruptions. Aside from occasionally feeling out of the social loop, they generally reported little to no hardships. Nearly all of these kids were surprised by the ease with which they quickly adjusted to life without mobile connectivity. Their parents, on the other hand, experienced the children’s deprivation quite differently! Their reactions paralleled those of the moms who put aside their own mobile devices. Parents maintained a constant level of anxiety and stress; they worried for the safety of loved ones, and reported feelings of detachment. They came to realize how critical the cell phone was to their peace of mind, and how intricately connected the device is to their willingness to grant autonomy and independence to their pre-teens. “It’s a tool for me to keep in touch with them and know where they are, and to allow them a little more responsibility while still having my little claws on them,” one mom said. Without the phones, kids continued to exercise their autonomy, but with parents having no immediate or direct way to contact them, worry loomed large. The deprivation moms themselves reported that their world became smaller and smaller, as they ventured from home less often, and

refrained from straying too far from a land-line phone. Said one mom, “Just being at home felt safer; in case of emergency, I can be reached.”

DISCUSSION

Consumer decision making is a “cognitive unconscious” process in which both underlying values, past experiences, and current contexts affect the choices individuals make. The deprivation component of the Living In A Digital World project allowed us to see this process at work. In the initial qualitative research, as well as the pre-deprivation interviews, research participants provided “rational” explanations for their media choices, those most heavily reliant on conscious thought and current context. As the deprivation subjects began living without their technology platforms and devices, however, the more emotional, subconscious, and value-driven motivations and benefits for media use began to surface. In addition to seeing this rational-emotional dichotomy as evident in the results of the deprivation research itself, we also see it when we consider how the deprivation research compares to and integrates with the other methodologies we employed. When we look at the top motivations and benefits that were endorsed by the respondents in the telephone survey, we see that, although consistent in some ways with the deprivation results, there are also some interesting differences.

From a methodological standpoint, one of the critical components of the deprivation research was the daily calls made to each of the participants. These conversations both encouraged and facilitated participants’ reflections on their experience, allowing them to report the subconscious feelings that had surfaced on a daily basis, instead of simply reporting what was top-of-mind during a single interview. The daily calls also allowed the research team to monitor the effectiveness of the methodology in elucidating the participants’ awareness of the motivations and benefits, to see at what point in the deprivation period the absence of the medium or media in their lives was enough to bring them to the level of consciousness.

Footnotes

1. Olson, J.C. and Reynolds, T.J. (2001). The means-end approach to understanding consumer decision making, p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 13.
3. Zaltman, G. (2003). *How Customers Think*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, p. 49.
4. . Olson, J.C. and Reynolds, T.J. (2001), Op. Cit., p. 337..

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