

Office of the Children's Commissioner and Amplify:

# Children, young people and the commercial world

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## Foreword from the Children's Commissioner

*"I've seen kids get bullied because they have a 'brick' for a mobile phone or they don't get the jokes made that reference a certain video game." – Girl, (age unknown)*

*"We live in a completely different culture and economic times. The last 10 years have seen ridiculous changes in living standards and expectations. We are now an instant society which adults were not brought up in." – Boy, 16*

The impact of commercialisation on childhood is frequently reported in the media and debated by politicians and parents, often based on a fear that they are being pressured into growing up too soon, in all sorts of ways. However despite the number of investigations into this area, children and young people's voices have by and large been absent from the debate.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children have the right to express their views on issues affecting them, and have their views taken seriously. We saw the announcement of the Government's independent review on the commercialisation of childhood headed by Reg Bailey, as a good opportunity for children and young people to have their voices heard at the highest levels in this discussion. We worked with *Amplify*, our children and young people's advisory group, to find out what they think about this important issue which affects them most but which they are least likely to be asked about. We also gathered the views of other children and young people across England through a survey designed by *Amplify*. The survey provided vital insights into what they think.

This report contains our survey results and key findings. The findings paint a complex picture. Children and young people realise they are under pressure to own material goods. When asked about their awareness of commercialisation, they recognised its influence. As well as obvious advertising techniques, young people are aware of non-traditional forms such as Twitter feeds. Yet elsewhere, the survey shows some possessions make young people feel valued, giving a sense of belonging to groups they want to join.

Owning items such as designer clothes and gadgets made responding children and young people feel confident. The confidence they gain influences their sense of self-worth. The young people who took part in this research told us they worry about being seen as unable to afford things. The lack of possessions, they felt, can lead to bullying. This feedback chimes with work we have done on the impact of childhood poverty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Trying to get by': Consulting with children and young people on poverty, Office of the Children's Commissioner, March 2011. Available at: [http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content\\_480](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_480) [accessed 23 May 2011].

Throughout this report, children and young people also demonstrate how perceptive they are about the commercial world around them. Just as adults see the pressure placed on children, there was recognition from the children who fed their views back to us that adults are pressured to buy certain goods too, and some sympathy from youngsters about those pressures on their parents' generation.

Children felt adults worried about their children losing out if they did not own products. They recognised the risk of families feeling unequal.

*“Because the kids want the latest things that cost a lot then the adults might not be able to afford it and they won't want their kids to get mocked for not having the latest things.” – Girl, 13*

Children and young people are not against advertising or marketing *per se* and acknowledge their economic benefits, even saying they were vital. But they realise the negative impact they can have, especially through creating more pressure to fit in. They had less to say about some issues the Bailey review investigated, like the risk of early sexualisation through child-centred marketing of some goods. They were more concerned with the wider picture of the world in which they are growing up.

Anyone interested in understanding what children and young people think about the commercialisation of childhood should read this report.



**Maggie Atkinson**  
**Children's Commissioner for England**

## **Foreword from Amplify**

### **The Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group**

The thinking for this report started in November 2010 when *Amplify* got together in a snowy residential centre in Lincolnshire. We were asked whether we thought children and young people were affected by the commercial world. We explored what we thought were the pressures on children and young people and then came up with a questionnaire to distribute throughout the country to find out what under 18s across England thought.

We were over the moon when more than 500 young people completed it and shared what they think about the commercial world. It was really interesting to look at the information and find out that celebrities actually have a much smaller influence than we expected and that young people would rather be valued by their peers and feel that sense of belonging. As part of our work on this, we met Reg Bailey for an afternoon and shared our work. We understand that what we told him has influenced his report, as well as leading to the publication of this one.

We really hope you enjoy what we've put together, and can hear the voice of children and young people throughout our report.

### **From the members of Amplify**

## About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dr Maggie Atkinson. The post of Children's Commissioner for England was established by the Children Act 2004. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) underpins and frames all of our work.

The Children's Commissioner has a duty to promote the views and interests of all children in England, in particular those whose voices are least likely to be heard, to the people who make decisions about their lives. She also has a duty to speak on behalf of all children in the UK on non-devolved issues which include immigration, for the whole of the UK, and youth justice, for England and Wales. One of the Children's Commissioner's key functions is encouraging organisations that provide services for children always to operate from the child's perspective.

Under the Children Act 2004 the Children's Commissioner is required both to publish what she finds from talking and listening to children and young people, and to draw national policymakers' and agencies' attention to the particular circumstances of a child or small group of children which should inform both policy and practice.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has a statutory duty to highlight where we believe vulnerable children are not being treated appropriately in accordance with duties established under international and domestic legislation.

## About Amplify

### The Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group

Amplify, the Children's Commissioner's children and young people advisory group, consists of 23 children and young people aged between nine and 18 from across England. The Group was set up in October 2010 following a recruitment process over the summer. They meet three to four times a year and have regular contact with each other and the Office of the Children's Commissioner between meetings. The Diana Award manages the group on behalf of the Children's Commissioner.

## Introduction and background

This report has been submitted as part of the evidence for Reg Bailey's independent review into the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood.

On Saturday 27 November 2010 Amplify – the Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group, held discussions about the commercialisation of childhood. This is a continuing concern for many parents and adults resulting in a number of reviews into the issue. Previous reviews carried out for the Government have looked into the nature of commercialisation of childhood (David Buckingham's review, 2009); internet safety (Tanya Byron's reviews 2008 and 2010); and sexualisation of childhood (Linda Papadopoulos' review for the Home Office, 2010). However despite the range of investigations into this area, children and young people's voices have by and large been absent from the debate.

In December 2010, the Government set up an independent review, headed by Reg Bailey, Chief Executive of the Mother's Union, to investigate commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. In order to open the debate wider for children and young people, Amplify developed an online questionnaire based on their discussions, and gathered the views of 552 children and young people across England. The survey was carried out in January 2011. In February 2011, Amplify presented their findings to the Children's Commissioner and to Reg Bailey.

This report summarises the key findings and voices of the children and young people who took part in Amplify's discussions and their online survey.

# Methodology

## Residential weekend

Nineteen children and young people attended Amplify weekend residential in November 2010, where the focus of discussions were on commercialisation of childhood. Discussions were split into three parts: What are the commercial influences that surround children and young people? How do children and young people find out about brands and trends? What do children and young people think about the influence on them from the commercial world? At the residential Amplify also received training in questionnaire design and the group then set about designing an online questionnaire which went live in January 2011, based on their discussions.

## Survey

The survey developed by Amplify covered: children and young people's spending power – how much money they have and how they spend it; the pressures on children and young people to own certain items; and the pressures on adults.

A total of 552<sup>2</sup> children and young people completed the survey ranging in age from under eight to 18 years. Sixty per cent were female and 85% described themselves as White and British. Respondents came from all over England, with the highest proportion of respondents in the North East and the smallest in the South West. In all, 91% were in school or college, 10% described themselves as having a disability and 11% are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM).

The rest of this report summarises the findings from both Amplify's discussions and their online survey. It is split into three sections:

- Part A summarises what children and young people told us about the amount of money they have to spend and what influences surround their spending decisions.
- Part B summarises what children and young people told us about the pressures on them as well as what pressures they think are on adults.
- Part C looks at children and young people's views of commercialisation

A fuller summary of the demographic information of those who took part in the survey can be found in Annex 1.

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<sup>2</sup> The demographic questions were asked at the end of the survey and 460 respondents completed this information. The numbers answering each question also varied. All percentages in this report are based on the numbers who completed the question unless otherwise indicated.



## Part A: Spending power and the commercial influences that surround children and young people

### What are you and your friends 'into' at the moment?

In order to gather a context for wider discussions, we initially asked members of Amplify about current trends and the sorts of things they and their friends are 'into' or interested in. Their answers fall into the categories listed below and tend to be specific to what was going on at the time. For instance, in terms of TV, 'X-Factor' and 'I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here' were commonly referred to and were being screened at the time. In terms of news and current affairs, university fees and the royal engagement were most commonly referred to.

- Food
- Gaming
- Music
- Celebrities
- News / Current Affairs
- Mobile technology
- Social networking
- Fashion
- TV / Film

These discussions form the basis for four questions in the survey:

- What do parents buy for you and how often?
- What do you buy for yourself and how often?
- What else do you spend your money on?
- Why do you mainly buy things?

### What do parents buy for children and young people and how often?

*"I don't spend my money on anything, my parents do. I save it up for when I'm older!" – Male, 11*

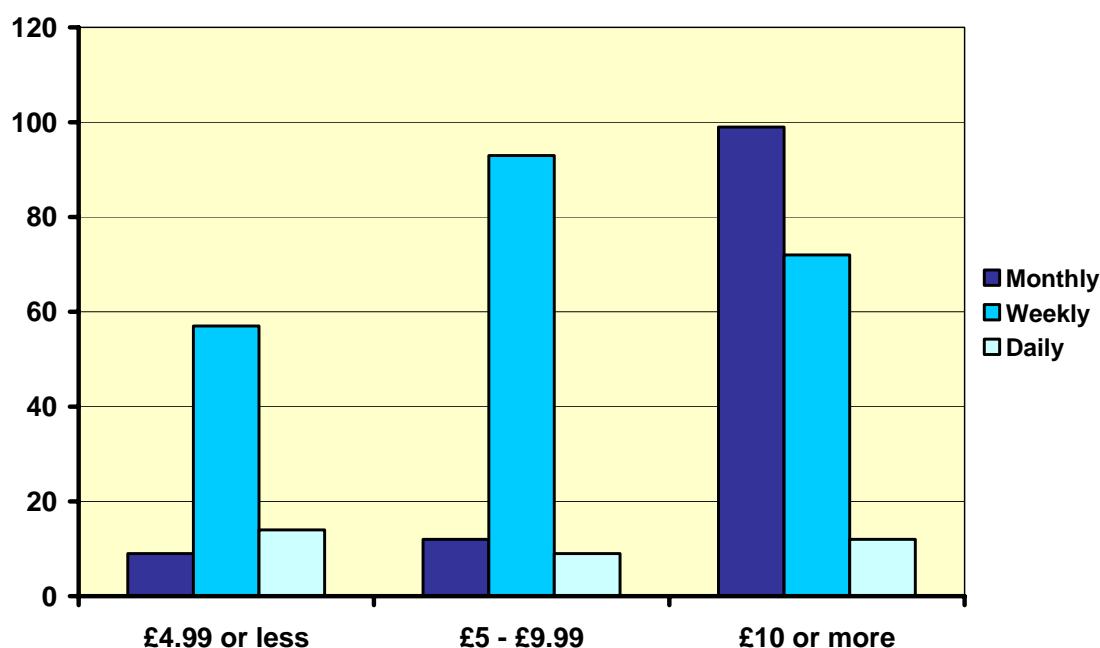
In the survey 40% of the 552 children and young people who completed the survey say that their parents or guardians buy them mobile phones (including top-ups and paying bills) whenever they want them or need them and a total of 46%, primarily girls, say their parents buy them fashion items, make-up, clothes and shoes. Meals and days out are bought a few times a year and high value electrical items such as MP3 players and games consoles less frequently, only once or twice a year, perhaps for birthdays or other celebrations. Music (CDs or downloads), DVDs and

computer games are also bought by parents or guardians but the frequency of when these are bought does not suggest any particular trend other than these items are likely to be bought for specific events or as treats throughout the year.

### How much money do children and young people have to spend?

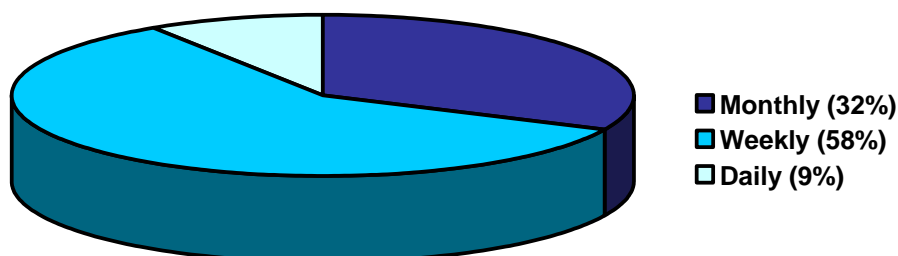
Over two thirds of respondents (68%) get regular pocket money or an allowance from their parent(s) or guardian(s), while 172 (31%) children and young people receive neither pocket money nor an allowance.

### Amount and frequency of pocket money

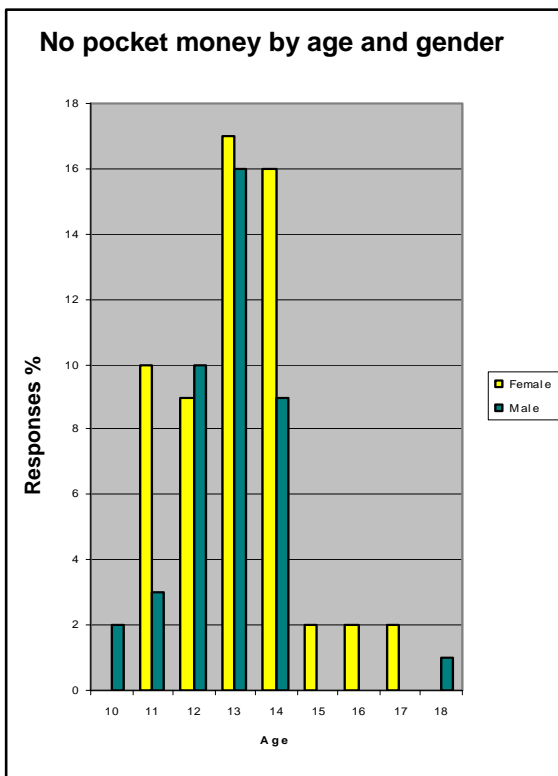
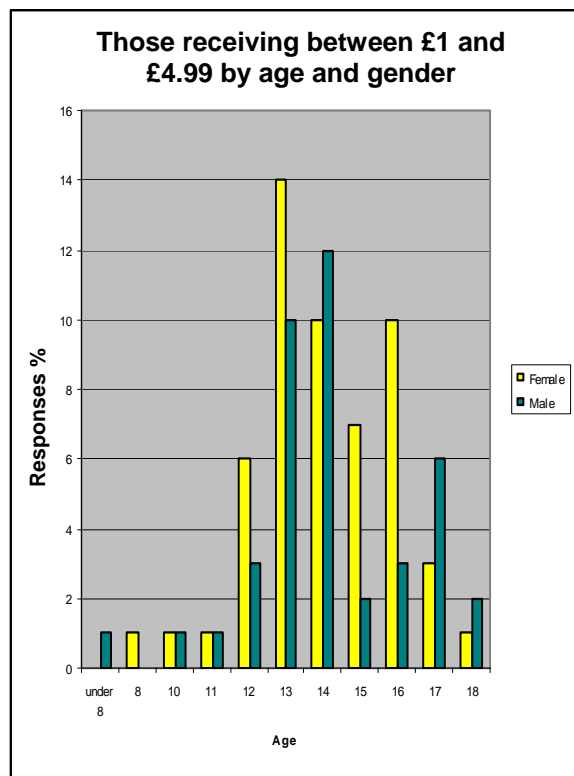
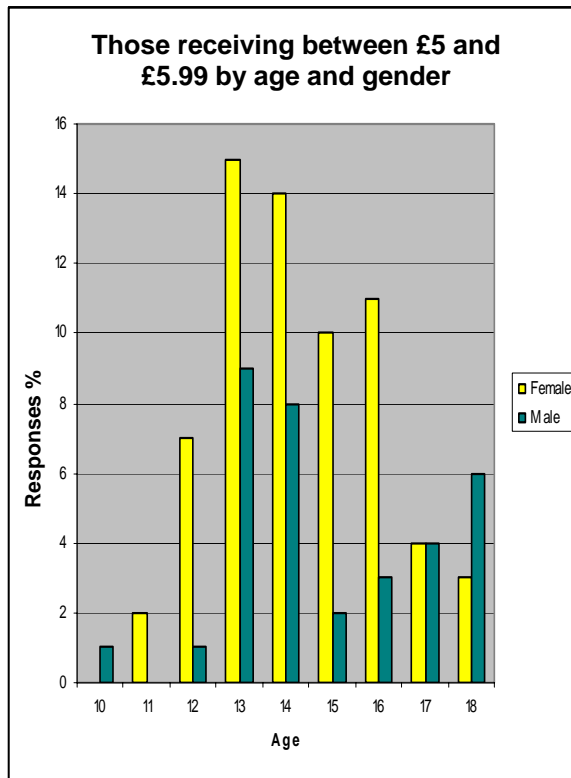
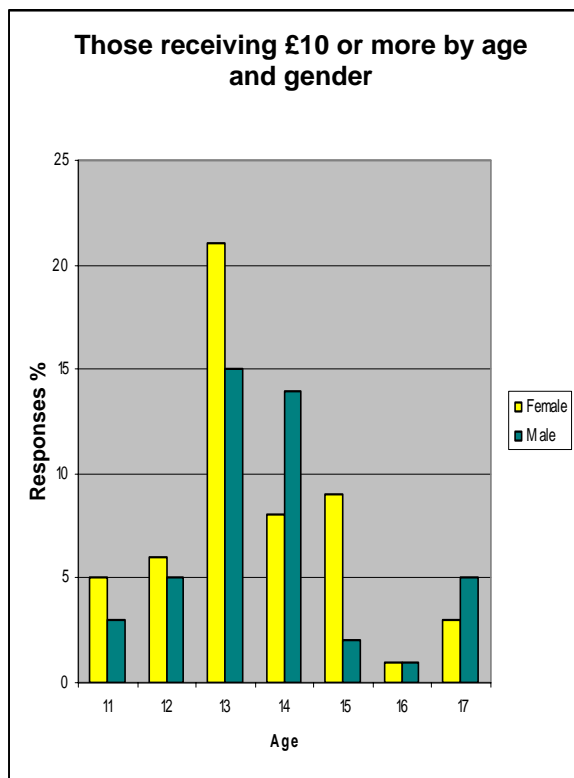


Thirty per cent of children and young people receive between £5 and £10 primarily weekly and 21% receive less than £5, again mainly on a weekly basis. Nearly 10% of respondents have a full or part time job and of these 52% also receive regular pocket money or an allowance.

### Frequency of receiving £10 or more pocket money



Of those who do receive money from their parent(s) or guardian(s) around half (49%) receive over £10. Of these, 54% receive this amount monthly, 39% weekly and 12 respondents (7%) receive it daily.



Overall, girls were more likely than boys to receive some form of allowance or pocket money.

## What do children and young people buy for themselves and how often?

*“Sweets, magazines, make-up, other things that I don’t need, but want.”*

– **Female, 12**

*“Xbox 360, stuff, clothes and phones.”* – **Male, 14**

*“Whatever I want as long as my parents allow it.”* – **Male, 13**

The main things children and young people spend their money on are snacks and sweets, followed by fashion items, clothes and make up. Girls are more likely to buy these whenever they want them or need them (61%). Boys were more likely to buy items relating to leisure activities and sports. They also tend to buy video or computer games (39%) and music (36%) whenever they want them or need them.

*“Body sprays, and lip gloss and things like that. Just things I can buy for under £2.”* – **Female, 11**

*“Football tickets.”* – **Male, 14**

*“I spend my money on toys, Xbox 360 games and clothes.”* – **Male, 12**

*“Small things that I want but then the rest of my pocket money goes into my mum’s book so that if I want some money I have to ask her unless I get it out of my bank account.”* – **Female, 14**

*“Going out with my mates and lots of clothes.”* – **Female, 13**

*“iTunes, presents for family and friends, sweets and school stuff.”* – **Female, 12**

*“I usually spend my money on music downloads or app downloads from websites like iTunes. I also usually spend my money on clothes and jewellery, etc.”* – **Female, 12**

Other common items children and young people spend their money on include, lunch money and travel; gifts for friends and family; books and magazines. Four per cent of respondents said that they save their money.

*“Travel money, dinner money for each day, toiletries and a phone bill.”* – **Male, 17**

*“Lunch money for school most of the time. Anything I buy that is for me and usually my friends’ birthday presents.”* – **Female, 15**

*“Books and travel to places (which costs a lot for young people).”* – **Male, 18**

*“When I go out with my friends or if I am saving up for something particular.”*

– **Female, 12**

*“Things that I need, clothes when I grow out of them, etc. I sometimes save my money then buy what I would like.”* – **Female, 11**

Not surprisingly more expensive goods such as mobile phones and electrical items are rarely bought by children and young people and when they were, this is only once (and possibly twice) a year.

Amplify were asked how they find out about brands and trends. This generated interesting discussions with answers ranging from, “I randomly saw it in a shop window,” to “R-Patz had one in the Twilight film and I bugged my mum for ages!” Particularly when talking about fashion, a lot of the group members said when they saw someone else wearing a product, this made them feel like they should have it. “There is lots of pressure in my school to conform to coolness” said one 11 year old.

The influence of celebrities is complex. Some of the group felt that if a celebrity was seen wearing something or using a particular product it gave it credibility, so they felt that celebrities are important in defining what people like. An example given was Nintendo’s series of TV and printed adverts of JLS playing the Wii. It was felt that because children and young people aspire to be like certain celebrities, they will wear and buy anything they endorse. However, from the survey relatively few children and young people (14%) say that they would buy something if they see a celebrity with it. In the discussions with Amplify some of the group also felt that they would rather be more like a celebrity in terms of personality rather than buy the things they see a celebrity wear or use.

Whilst TV adverts were frequently raised as a means for knowing about certain goods and products, the group thought that the majority of children and young people are not moved to buy something as a result of a TV advert. In the survey 20% of children and young people say they would buy something if they saw it on a TV advert. The children and young people in Amplify felt that often they do not trust the messages in adverts and that not only were adverts misleading, but they also considered them as being manipulative, making people think they needed something. Most children and young people are drawn to a product by passing shops or by what their friends own. If a product is on offer or is a “good deal” then they would also be more likely to buy it. Again this is reflected in the survey with 61% saying they would buy something if they had seen it or tried it in a shop and 39% if their friends had told them about it.

*“I used it at a friend’s house and got it for myself.”* – **Male, 13**

*“Saw my friends wearing it and thought it looked really nice on them.”* – **Female, 15**

*“Good review on YouTube.”* – **Female, 15**

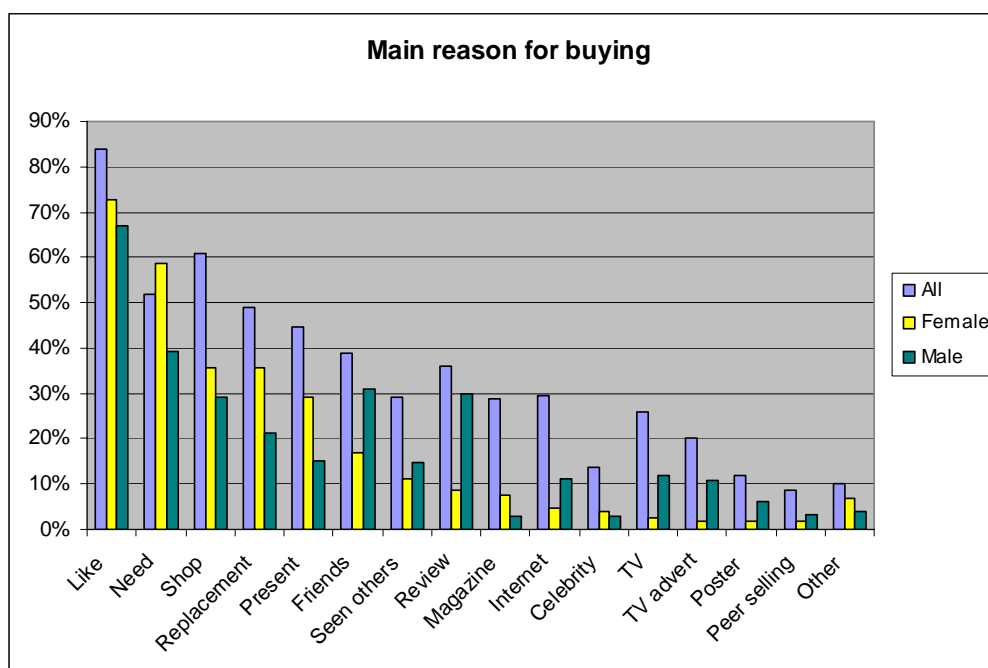
Additionally, some young people in Amplify liked “freebie” advertising such as giving free samples which makes consumers more aware of the product, but are not so keen on paper inserts that fall out of magazines. Interestingly, a number of the group also felt that they were more inclined to buy a product if they had read or seen a good review of it, this is reflected in the survey with 36% of responses.

Amplify also thought that internet advertising is having more and more of an effect on children and young people. One of the group members first clicked on a pop-up advert when he was four years old. Another’s first experience of YouTube was when he was six. Another statement made was that:

*“Sometimes things/products don’t need to be advertised and everyone hears about it, for example, on YouTube.” – Male, 15*

In the survey overall, the three most important reasons for buying items are because they like it (84%), saw it or tried it in a shop (61%) or needed it (52%). Other popular reasons are replacing something old or broken (49%) or buying a present (44.7%). Girls are more like to see it and try it in a shop (36%) or to replace something that was old or broken (36%), whereas boys are more likely to buy something if their friends had told them about it (31%), read a good review (30%) or again seen it and tried it in a shop (29%).

*“Because I need it, and it’s in fashion.” – Female, 14*  
*“I’ve seen it a lot in shops and think I’d like it.” – Female, 11*  
*“I got bored of my old games.” – Male, 13*



The full list of categories was:

- You liked it
- You need it
- You saw or tried it in a shop
- To replace something that was old or broken
- You wanted to get it as a present for someone else
- Your friends told you about it
- You saw or heard about it on the internet
- You read a good review about it
- You saw it in a magazine
- You saw lots of people with it
- You saw a celebrity with it
- You saw/heard it in a radio/TV programme
- You heard/saw it on a radio/TV advert
- You saw it on a poster
- A friend told you about it on behalf of the company
- Other

The lowest scoring reasons for buying items overall are friends telling them on behalf of the company (9%); poster campaigns (12%) and celebrity endorsement (14%). The 'other' answers include buying on the spur of the moment, wanting to try something new and wanting to be different.

*“Because I like to be different and if I’m aware no one else has it, I will most certainly buy it, simply due to the fact I love being different to everyone else.”*  
– **Female, 16**

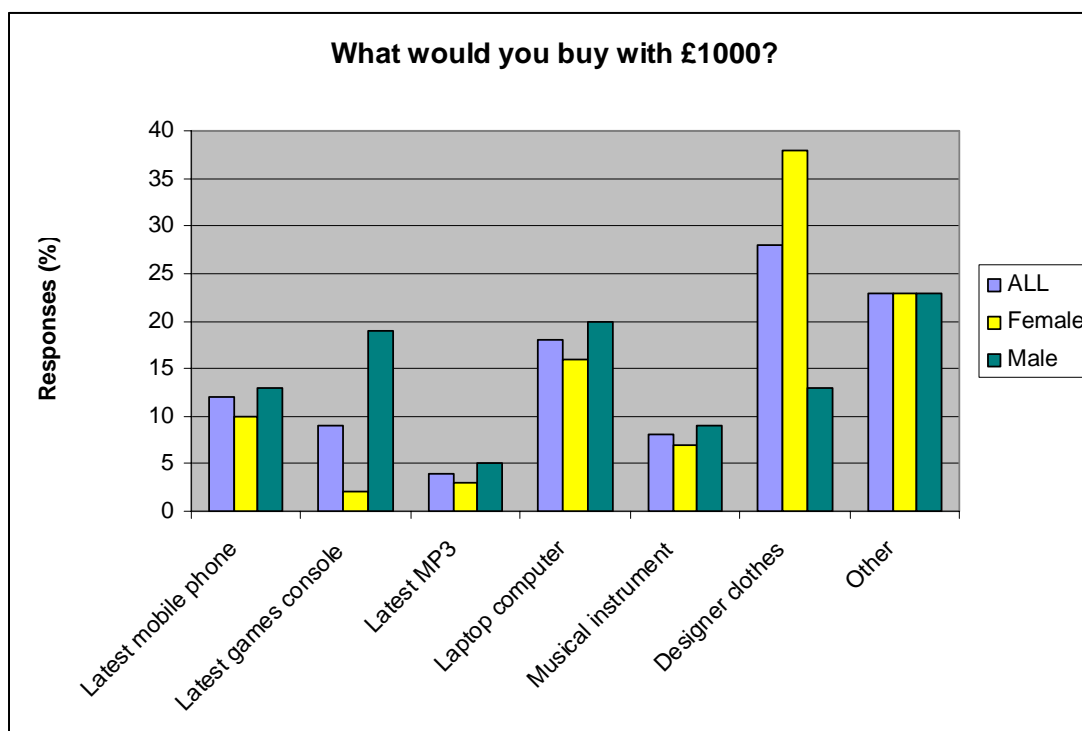
**If you had £1,000 to buy any product from any shop, what would you buy?**

*“High street clothes, a musical instrument, buy something for family/friends and I would do something with friends, perhaps have a photoshoot or go to a theme park, the rest I would save for when I needed it.”* – **Female, 15**

When the children and young people from Amplify were asked what they would buy with £1,000 the answers were most frequently an iPhone, an Xbox, new shoes, branded clothes and holidays. Some children and young people asked for more money so they could buy cars, houses and even completely change their lifestyle so they could live like a footballer. Some young people also got very excited about owning an island. The main answers formed the option list for a similar question in the survey together with a follow up question on how owning these items would make them feel.

Overall, 28% of respondents to the online survey would spend their £1,000 on designer clothes, saying they would feel fashionable, confident and better looking.

The other popular purchases would be high value electrical items: a laptop computer (18%) making them feel cool proud and successful; the latest mobile phone (12%) making them feel cool; and the latest games console (9%) also making them feel cool. However, when looking at the responses by gender, it is clear that girls were more likely to want to buy designer clothes and boys the electrical items.



A relatively high proportion of respondents (and similar across genders) opted for the 'other' option. Of these, 20% said they would save or invest the money. A further 15% said they would buy non-designer clothes (both options were predominantly female responses). Boys would buy video and computer games or items relating to driving.

Overall, owning the items they bought with £1,000 would make children and young people who completed the survey feel **cool, fashionable, proud** and **confident**. Girls were more likely to feel **fashionable, confident** and **better looking**, whereas boys were more likely to feel **cool, successful** and **respected more by others**.

***Which item: other***

*“Just clothes, not designer though as I’d get more hunting round for a bargain!”*

*“When I feel smart and well presented, my confidence is higher, because I feel good about myself.” – Female, 13*



**Which item: other – an SLR camera**

*“I don't necessarily think it would make me feel any better about myself, I'd just feel proud that I'd purchased it myself and look forward to using it.” – Male, 14*

**Which item: designer clothes**

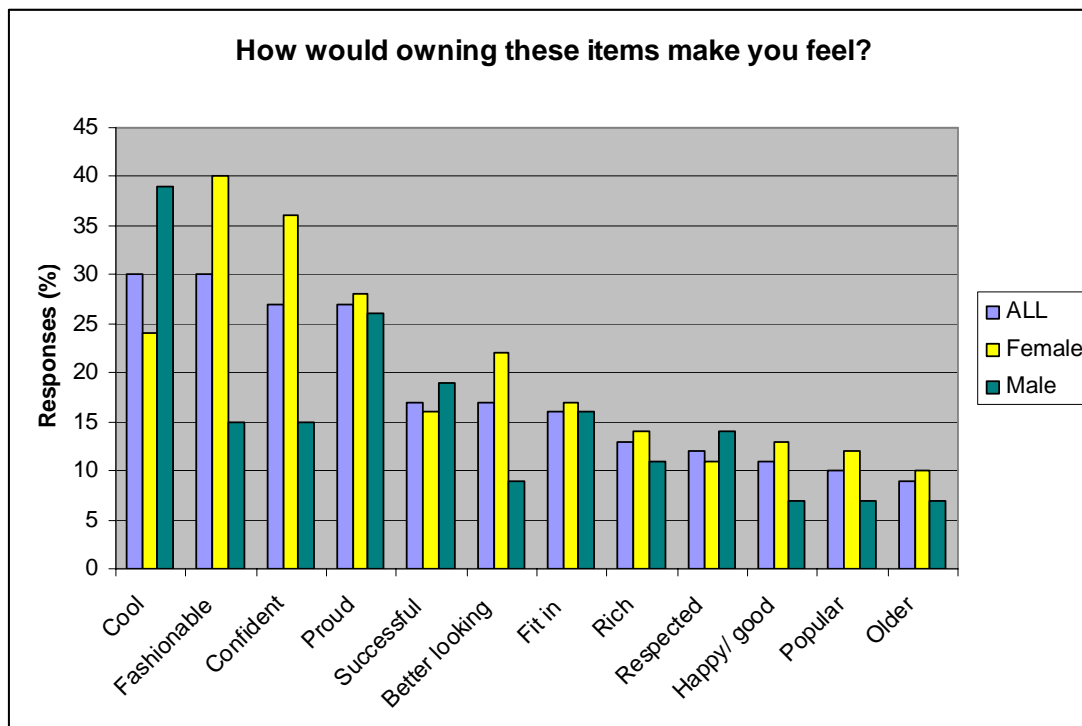
*“I might feel more, individual because no one else would have it.” – Female, 14*

**Which item: a laptop computer**

*“I would be successful in school work because on my new laptop I would have the latest software (like Microsoft Office 2010) which would make my homework look more snazzy!” – Female, 13*

**Which item: designer clothes**

*“Better looking, because thin models wear designer clothes.” – Male, 14*



## Part B: The pressures on children, young people and adults

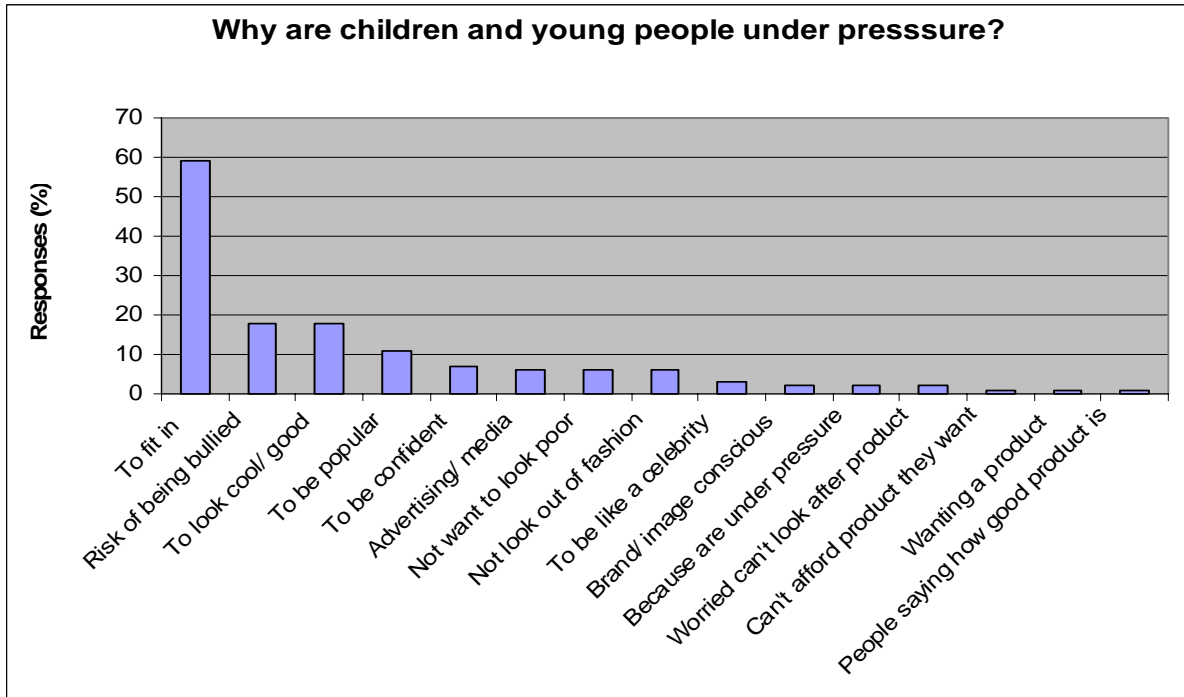
*“Some things you buy because they're cool: clothes from Superdry or a new iPod touch. Some things you can get cut off by if you don't have: if you've got a phone that lets you onto Twitter, Facebook and the internet, and have a contract that lets you text and call as much as you like, you can be sociable and don't get left out. It's a real issue for young people who don't have those items: you either buy them, or stay on the sidelines.” – Female, 16*

The majority (85%) of respondents thought children and young people are under pressure to own certain items, although 67 (15%) children and young people do not think this is the case. A range of reasons are given but overwhelmingly those who think there are pressures on children, say it is because of the pressure to fit in. Peer pressure and not feeling alone are also cited. Other reasons are because of the risk of bullying, the pressure to look cool and to be popular. One of the themes that came out of the responses is that some children and young people feel pressure not to look poor. Whilst this has not come out strongly in the quantitative results, it is a common underlying theme in the answers and discussions. For example the theme of pressure to look “better” than they think they are in terms of status or wealth came through.

*“Because some of the other kids might not be able to afford the latest mobile phone then they will get mocked about it.” – Female, 13*

*“If they have something really old or something broken but they use it and they go out to school and then they see other people with better things they feel bad because they think other people will laugh at them because that thing is broken or really old and they can't afford a new one.” – Female, 14*

*“Because the more expensive an item is the better the outcome is, so a person with expensive clothes, phone, laptop, etc will be considered by many as popular, cool, rich, pretty, etc.” – Female, 15*



*“Because the people who have these items look down on the people that don’t. This makes other people think they are better because they can be mean to other people. So people try to be like the person at the top so they aren’t the person at the bottom being bullied or feeling left out or different.” – Female, 15*

*“If you don’t people gossip. If you don’t you get teased or people think you are really poor, you feel very self-conscious and that you are unwanted.”  
– Female, 11*

*“I think it’s because people don’t want to get picked on because of what they own.” – Female, 13*

*“Peer pressure and it is like the adverts are on all the time saying what you should own – all the time even stuff in films.” – Female, 13*

*“Probably to belong to a social group because they’re insecure about being called poor or something.” – Male, 17*

*“Young people feel under pressure to have the latest phone or the internet or anything that proves you have money.” – Female, 15*

*“Because what you own symbolises your family’s income.” – Male, 14*

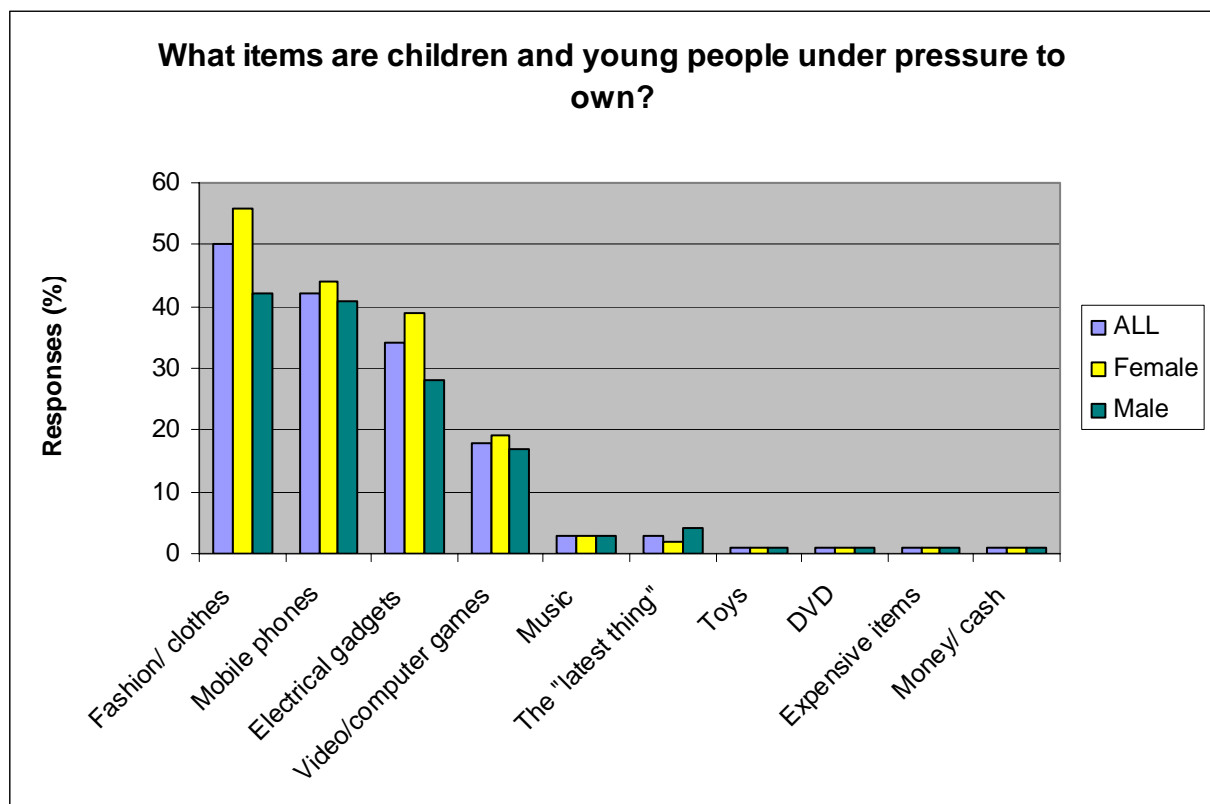
“Because everyone else seems to have them and none of us want to look poor. Also – nearly everything I watch and read has people looking glam with the latest gear and gadgets. Anyone who doesn’t have these looks poor in comparison.” – **Female, 15**

“Because it’s normal to have them, so if you don’t it’s unusual.” – **Female, 17**

“Because I want to be with my friends so we can have a laugh.” – **Male, 17**

“Because it makes them ‘cool’. I’ve seen kids get bullied because they have a ‘brick’ for a mobile phone or they don’t get the jokes made that reference a certain video game.” – **Female**

Overall, the kind of items children and young people in the survey say they are under pressure to own the most are fashion and clothes, with half of those completing the survey saying so. Just under half (42%) say they feel under pressure to own a mobile phone, 34% say high value electrical items and gadgets and 18% saying video and computer games. Although in general there is no gender difference in terms of those feeling under pressure, girls tend to feel more under pressure than boys to own specific items or products.



*“Everything! – it isn't just about items, it's everything; the way you look, the way you act - whatever celebrities, magazines tell you to wear, it has to be bought . . . at any price – Jack Wills, Abercrombie, Hollister, iPods/Pads, Uggs, anything that is fashionable.” – Male, 17*

*“Everything! When you are young it is the latest toys and all the stuff in a range. When you are a bit older it is all about clothes, labels and looking good. When you are a bit older it is about your gadgets and technology.” – Female, 11*

*“Clothes. Girls in particular have a certain pressure to fit in as we all look and criticise others' outfits. Fashion changes regularly so it's hard to keep up.” – Female, 14*

*“Designer clothes, bags, everything in general, everyone wants to stand out from the crowd in a good way and not be whispered about.” – Female, 14*

*“Girls clothes. Wearing scruffy clothes makes people think you're a scruffy person and that you don't care about yourself properly. People buy designer clothes to show off how much money their parents have.” – Female, 13*

*“The latest phones, TVs, laptops and electronics in general. Also the newest make up items even if they are rubbish. Pieces of clothing despite the fact it will go out of fashion in a week.” – Male, 17*

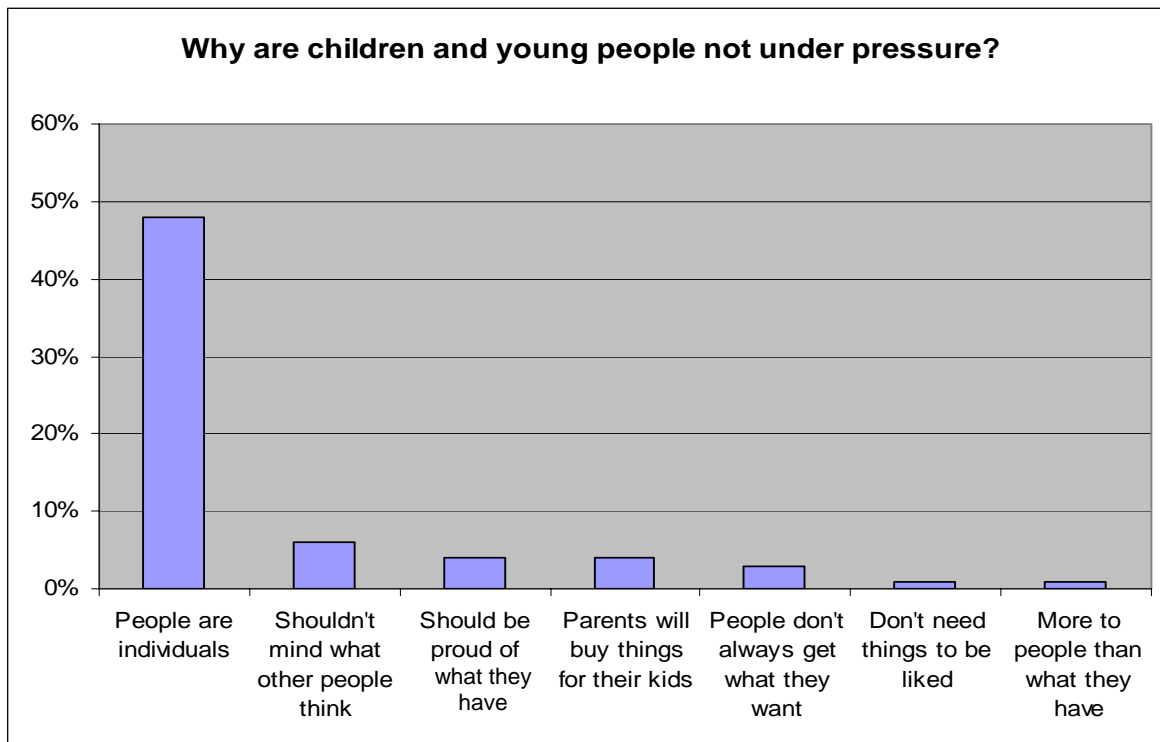
*“The most up-to-date things, such as phones and clothes, mostly due to magazines as everyone is always so worried about what others opinions are, when really if you're happy that's all that matters.” – Male, 12*

Of those in the survey who think children and young people are not under pressure, most (48%) think that people are individuals and can make their own decisions.

*“I don't think they feel forced in most cases – it tends to be their mums and dads letting them have whatever they want, rather than educating them from an early age.” – Male, 17*

*“Young people understand more than other people give them credit for. All of my friends wouldn't pressure me into owning some specific thing or branded item.” – Female, 14*

*“I don't and to be frank I think most people buy things simply because they like them. I think fashion is only a small part of the thought process when buying.” – Female, 13*



**Are adults concerned about the pressures on children and young people?**

*"I know my mum and dad are worried for me and my sister, because of all the skinny people we see in the magazines." – Female, 13*

A total of 333 (72%) of children and young people think that adults are concerned about the pressure on children and young people to own certain things. Around one in five think the main reason for parents' concern is the financial implications, with some respondents saying parents are concerned that they cannot afford for their children to have such items.

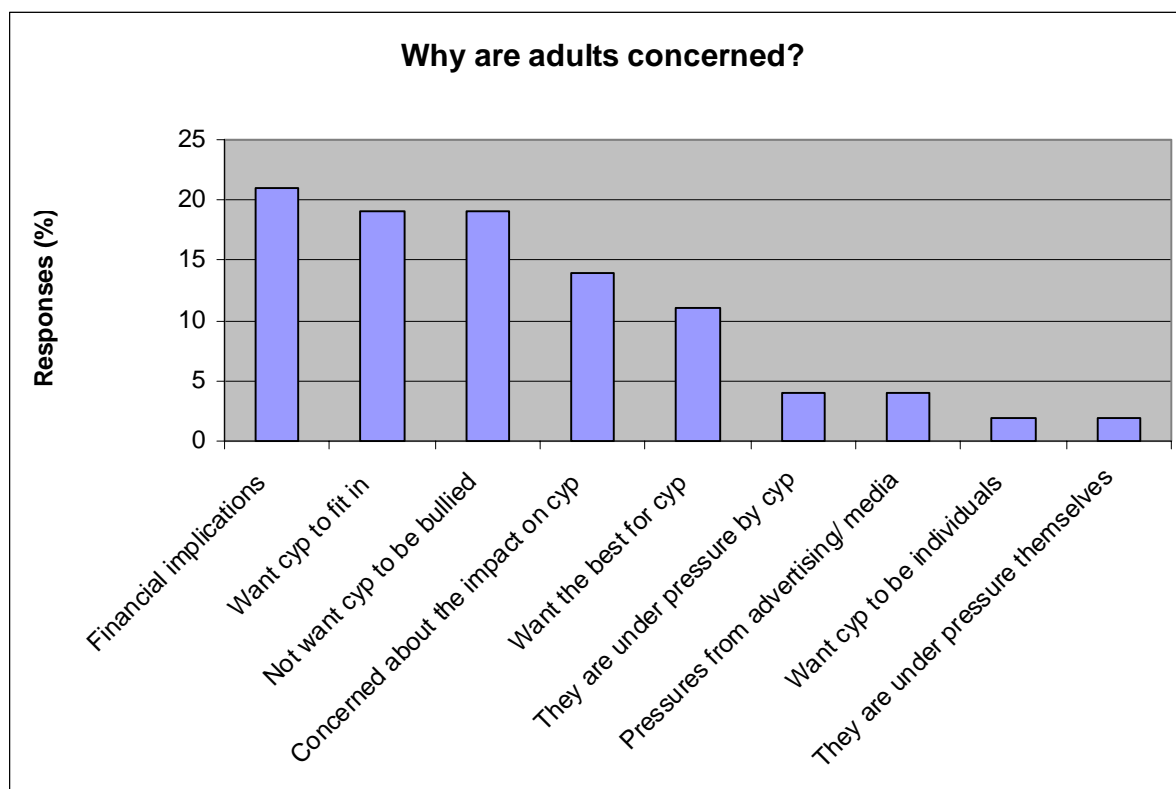
*"Because the kids want the latest things that cost a lot then the adults might not be able to afford it and they won't want their kids to get mocked for not having the latest things." – Female, 13*

*"Because they might not have enough money to buy." – Male, 14*

*"I think they are concerned, and the majority of them empathise with young people, but they have to prioritise and they simply cannot spend money on unnecessary things." – Female, 16*

A similar proportion of respondents (19%) also think that adults are worried about children wanting to fit in and to protect them from being bullied. A further 14% say

that adults are worried about the impact of the pressure on children and 11% say that adults simply want the best for their children.



\* CYP refers to children and young people

*“Adults want young people to feel comfortable and independent and not to have pressure on them.” – Male, 15*

*“Because they don’t want their child to feel as though they can’t have something they want/need.” – Female, 16*

*“We hear about the stories of anorexia or other social issues in the news and a common cause of this is commercialisation. So, in order to find a solution/ scapegoat, pressure to buy things is used as an excuse. I don’t think many young people themselves feel pressure to buy things but it is a concern for adults, who want the best for their children/young people.” – Female, 15*

*“Because kids want what every other kid has got. It costs their parents a lot of money.” – Male, 17*

*“Because they understand the pressure and are concerned about their children growing up too quickly.” – Female, 14*

*“I should hope so. We are under a lot of pressure to fit in, do well at school, wear the right clothes, have things like iPods etc.” – Female, 14*

*“They don’t want their children to be upset and feel left out.” – Male, 14*

*“Because they wouldn’t want their kid getting teased and picked on because they don’t have the latest trends.” – Female, 14*

*“Because they don’t want their children being laughed at for not having the most up to date gadgets and things.” – Female, 13*

*“Well if you are a parent then you don’t want your child to be bullied. They also want the best lives possible for their children.” – Female, 14*

Other responses include adults not approving of what their child wants and because their parents have told them that they are concerned. Two respondents say that adults are concerned because:

*“If they weren’t I wouldn’t be filling out this survey.” – Male, 17*

### **Why are adults *not* concerned about the pressures on children and young people?**

*“Because lots of adults don’t seem to do anything about it and many parents will just give a child what he/she wants to avoid an argument and to keep the child happy.” – Female, 14*

Of those children and young people in the survey who think adults are not concerned about the pressures on children and young people, this is primarily because they feel that adults do not fully understand what they are experiencing, that adults do not see it as a problem to be concerned about or that they are just unaware of the pressures children and young people feel under.

*“As it continues to go on.” – Female, 15*

*“Because adults don’t understand about being young and needing things to keep them popular.” – Female, 15*

*“We live in a completely different culture and economic times. The last 10 years have seen ridiculous changes in living standards and expectations. We are now an instant society which adults were not brought up in.” – Male, 16*

*“They do not care really. Parents feel as if their childhood was the right one and as there seems to be more pressure both academically and socially now they feel it’s not true and don’t care. Hence the persistent media presence of our education being easier than theirs. It’s not.” – Male, 16*

*“I don’t think some adults are particularly aware that it happens.” – Female, 16*

*“They all know what it’s like, and we’ll grow out of it.” – Female, 14*

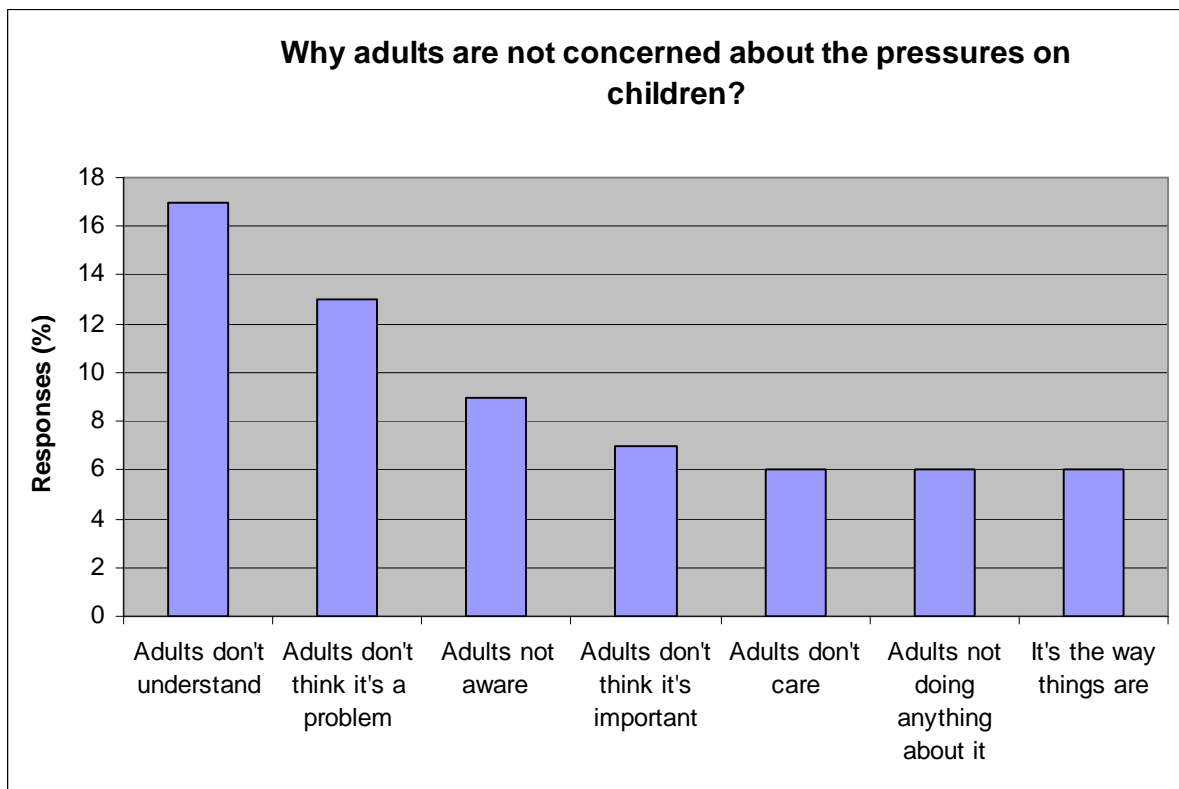


Other respondents think that adults are aware, but they don't consider it important or simply don't care. Five respondents had a more philosophical outlook and feel that it is simply part and parcel of life.

*“Because it’s a lesson as part of life you have to learn that you have to work for what you want and you don’t always get what you want.” – Female, 12*

One respondent commented that it was adults who are putting the pressure on in the first place.

*“Because a lot of the time it is adults selling them to us! Children don’t have enough say in their future, adults make decisions for them about their future.” – Male, 18*



**Pressures on adults**

*“Adults want to be/appear successful and if they feel that a certain item will help them do so, or will improve their life/business in some way, they will feel pressure to buy it. Also, in a business sense, in order to keep up with competitors, adults may feel the need to buy something that others already have.” – Female, 15*

Children and young people are more evenly split as to whether or not adults are under pressure themselves, with 54% thinking they are under pressure and 46% who do not think this is the case.

Of the 249 children and young people in the survey who think adults are under pressure, the majority (32%) say it is because of the pressure to demonstrate their status and to impress people. Thirty-two per cent also say adults experience peer pressure too and 12% think that adults are under the same pressures as children. Linked to this, other responses suggest that adults are influenced by advertising and marketing.

*“They feel the need for a ‘cool’ car/house/clothes just like we do, because that’s what their friends have.” – Female, 14*

*“Yes and for them it would be like cars and items for the house, as they may feel in competition with neighbours or friends.” – Female, 13*

*“Like the children it makes them feel part of a group, always wanting to be like the Jones’s.” – Male, 16*

*“Wherever there are peers, there’s peer pressure. It may not be as extreme or noticeable as they are adults and tend to think independently however some still follow the trends.” – Male, 14*

*“Because the system is pretty much the same with adults as it is with children, except with a few changes to items. There are some adults who only care about looking good, having a great husband, having nice, expensive clothes, and so on. Also, some adults buy various things to look ‘professional’ e.g. a school teacher buying sensible clothes.” – Female, 11*

*“Adults get suckered by advertising too and they get suckered by their kids. They want to make them happy so they buy things that they know are poorly made, but it’s what their kids want so they go along with it. I also think adults can be a bit obsessed with celebrities.” – Male, 14*

The same underlying theme of pressure not to appear poor and not being able to provide for children properly continues through some of the responses, as does empathy for adults lacking in confidence and not wanting to feel judged (or old).

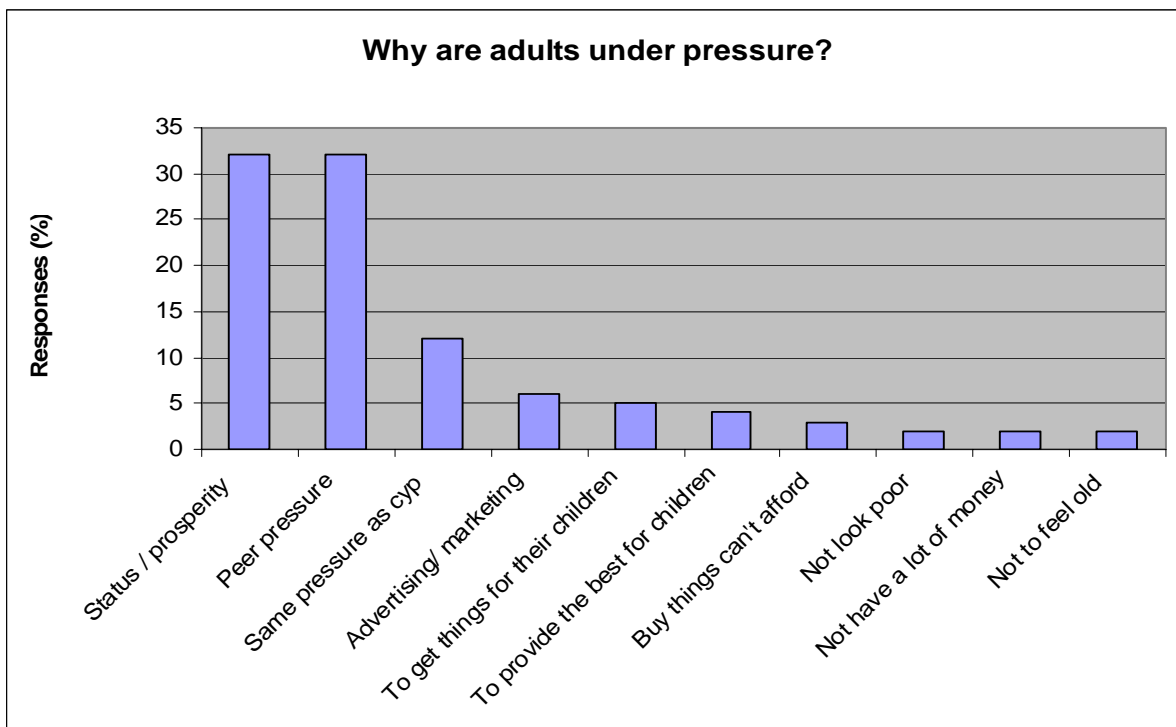
*“To make them feel younger and up to date because of advertising.” – Female, 16*

*“Because there is a stereotypical view of adults that they all have to own certain things like some kind of a decent house or a car but not all adults can afford those things.” – Female, 13*

*“Because they need to fit in too and don’t want to look cheap.” – Female, 17*

*“Because they want to be able to show how successful they have become by showing off what they can afford to buy. Also if there’s a popular item such as HD TV or plasma TV’s or iPhone, they feel under pressure to buy them because everyone is talking about them and saying how they own them.”  
– Female, 16*

*“Because some adults like to feel a sense of youth and want to be seen as dominant among others. Also there is a lot more pressure on adults to be part of the diverse ways of modern family life. Something which can sometimes work but at other times not work.” – Male, 17*



A total of 212 children and young people in the survey said adults were not under pressure. This is because they think adults tend not to worry about what people think and that they are more individual. Other reasons included adults have more choice and that adults are less materialistic.

*“Adults have less peer pressure than children.” – Female, 12*

*“There isn’t as much pressure from friends and adverts for adults.” – Male, 15*

*“Because they don’t care what people think.” – Female, 13*

*“Because I think that adults are able to rise above any peer pressure that they face. Also, I think that adults are far less materialistic than the younger generation.” – Female, 15*

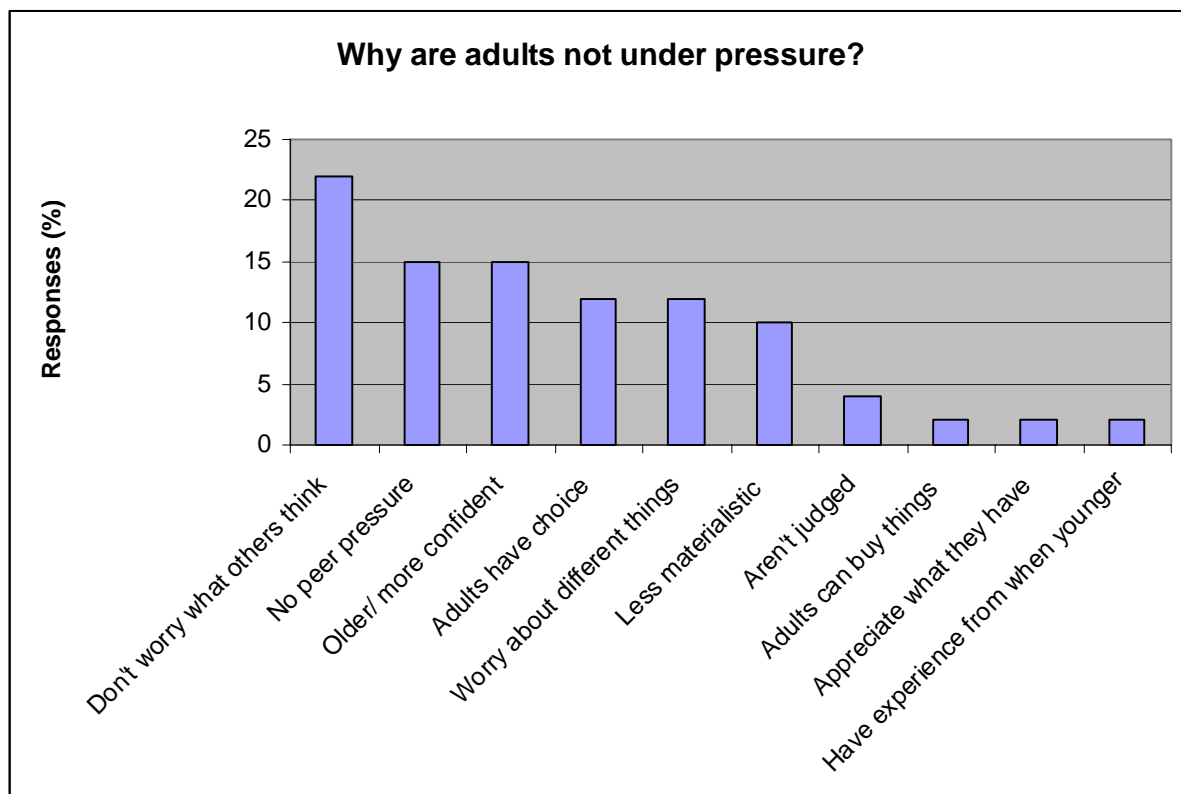
*“Because they know what to buy.” – Male, 14*

*“Because they are old enough to know that it’s up to them what they wear and buy.” – Female, 13*

*“They can buy what they want to and when they want so I don’t think they feel under pressure.” – Female, 15*

*“Because they are old enough to know they shouldn’t care about what other people think.” – Female, 13*

*“Not as bothered about being 'cool'.” – Female, 16*



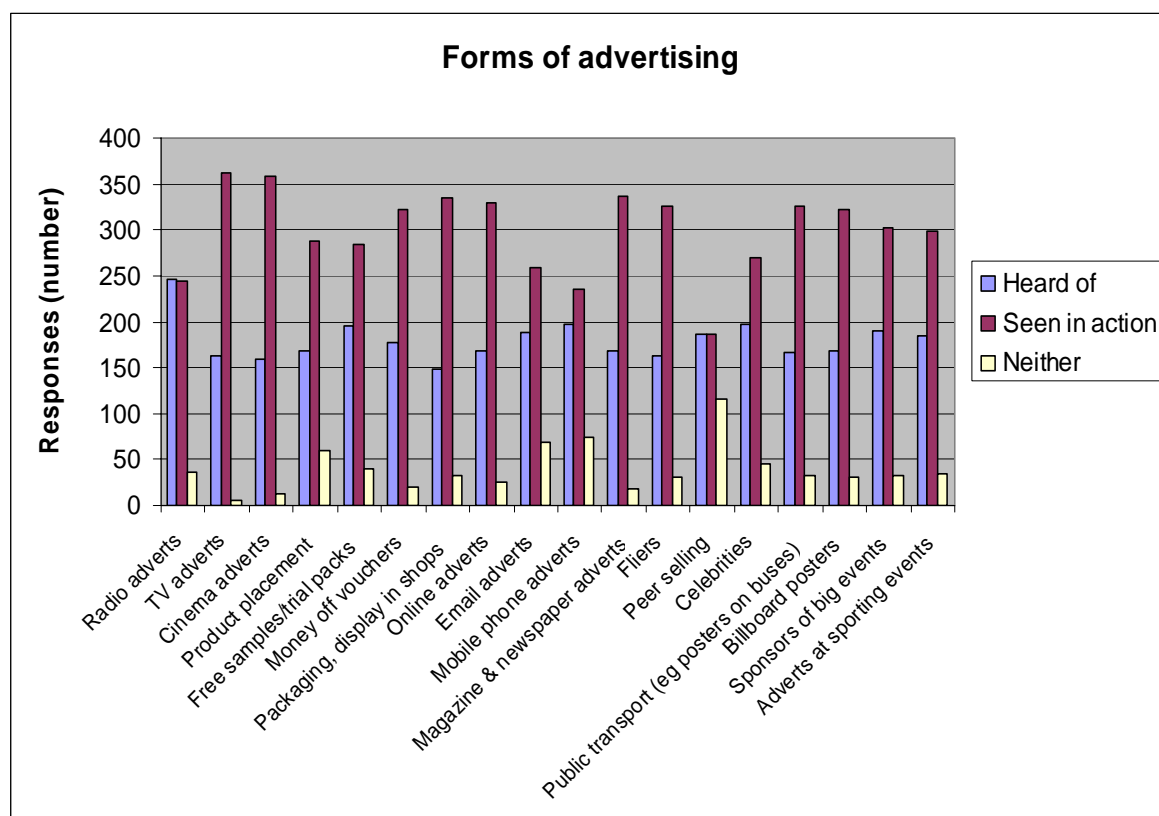
The survey also asked if children and young people put pressure on their parents to buy things for them and 82% of the children and young people who completed the survey think that they do. Due to the length of the questionnaire no further follow up questions were asked on this point.

## Part C: Children and young people’s views on commercialisation

*“Parents blame advertising but they should stop buying their kids rubbish. Younger kids are only exposed to adverts if they watch telly a lot. Companies want to make money so they advertise. There’s nothing wrong with that. Adverts don’t FORCE people to buy things.” – Male, 14*

### What forms of advertising have children and young people experienced or are aware of?

The majority of children and young people have experienced most of the forms of advertising in action, with the exception of **radio adverts**, **peer to peer advertising** and **mobile phone adverts**. In these cases, whilst boys are aware of them, a smaller proportion had experienced them.



The full list of categories were:

- Radio adverts
- TV adverts
- Sponsors of big events (perhaps on the back of tickets or items on sale at events)
- Product placement (where items appear in TV shows or films)
- Free samples/trial packs, etc
- Money off vouchers
- The way an item looks in the shop (e.g. packaging, signs, displays)
- Online adverts (e.g. banners/pop-ups)
- Public transport (e.g. posters on buses)
- Mobile phone adverts
- Magazine & newspaper adverts
- Information handed to you in the street, or through your letterbox, or leaflets in magazines, etc
- Friends telling you about things on behalf of the company
- Celebrities using it
- Email adverts
- Adverts at sporting events (brands on players' kits, advertising around the pitch etc)
- Adverts/trailers before a film at the cinema
- Billboard posters (i.e. big posters and signs in the streets)

### **What do you think about the different ways companies let people know about their products and services?**

Amplify also discussed the various ways that organisations alert children and young people about the products. As well as touching on the more obvious techniques of advertising, such as catchy jingles and sponsorship at sporting events, they also discussed the less traditional forms of advertising, including the use of 'Like' on Facebook, Twitter feeds and YouTube comments.

Discussions moved onto the positives and negatives of advertising and how it might impact on children and young people. On the positives there was a strong economic case in terms of the money advertising generates as well as the jobs that are created and maintained within the products' industries. The money television advertising generates also supports the creation of new TV programmes. For the younger group, TV adverts were also seen as positive as they allow viewers a break between shows. Overwhelmingly the biggest positive that came out was that, without advertising, people would not know about the newest products or the good deals/ special offers available.

In terms of the negative points, it was clear that the most damaging thing for a brand is when advertising for a product or service is misleading or incorrect. There was also discussion about advertising that was inappropriate for some audiences. The groups recognised that there are rules around which adverts can be shown on TV at certain times however they were concerned that a child of any age could see posters at bus stops advertising things like the SAW film (an 18 certificate horror movie).

### **Do you think commercialisation of children and young people is an issue?**

Discussions on this issue were split firmly by age group. The older group were clear that commercialisation was not an issue of concern for children and young people. They felt that they are 'savvy' consumers and it is their parents that are more vulnerable because they have not grown up with the same level of technology and experience of the internet. Therefore parents are not fully aware of the risk as much as children and young people who learn about them every week in Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE).

A number of the older group said that regardless of the influence of commercialisation, it is needed to keep the economy going. "We need to buy and sell. It's one of the key things that underpin society", however they went on further to say that "commercialisation has reached its peak and there might be an impact on global recession."

The younger group had a different opinion to that of the older group. They thought that commercialisation does affect them. They aspire to be like the celebrities, people they see on the TV and on posters and therefore will, "nag their parents until they give in, especially when it's trendy stuff."

One 12 year old said, "Children are losing their childhood, all of my friends spend so much time on Facebook when it's designed for older people." It was said that advertisers are clever and had caught on to this and are targeting children and young people who spend a lot of time online.

The older group also discussed some of the potential negative influences such as 'skinny models'. One member of the group said, "Young people will see this sort of advertising and think they should look as thin as them giving them an unrealistic image to look up to." The same group member went on to say, "Other young people are being influenced at an early age to buy or use products that they do not understand, the playboy pencil case for example which exposes someone to the adult entertainment industry without them even knowing." The group went on to talk about those who are unable to afford the "current trends" saying they could be bullied and made to feel like outcasts – although the discussions questioned the extent to which this may be due to other factors and not simply due to commercialisation.

The older group thought that the media is often “directly aimed at children and young people” by using stereotypical characters to advertise certain products to certain groups. TV shows such as *Skins* and *Misfits* are full with fashion trends and placed products that children and young people are not aware are having some bearing on the things they wear or buy.

Social satires such as *Misfits* and *Skins* are really critiquing youth culture and make people more aware of the stereotypes of young people rather than encouraging them. Stereotyping is not necessarily viewed as a bad thing. “Stereotyping creates a sense of community”, making you feel like you fit in and belong.

It is clear that the best way of advertising, as far as this group of children and young people are concerned, is word of mouth. “People I know have much more of an effect on me than ‘randomers’ I see on the TV,” said one 16 year old. Even though it’s often an unconscious decision, it was agreed that if their friends recommend something, they are much more likely to buy it.

It was felt that the media directly targeted certain groups of young people. The commercial world seems to be encouraging young people to belong to a ‘group’ and this is rarely a bad thing. When it came to talking about the commercial world’s impact on the economy, several group members were very quick to comment that advertising and marketing were absolutely necessary for a stable economic environment. The rest of the group seemed to agree and discussions continued with the final thought that, “The commercial world is one of the things that underpins our society; we should be very careful if we tamper with it.”



## Conclusions and key points from the research

Children and young people have much to say about commercialisation of childhood and this research provides an overview of their views and insights. More in-depth exploration should be undertaken to gather more of an insight into their views of the issues and impacts on the following key areas that have emerged from this research.

**Peer pressure:** Children and young people overwhelmingly feel that the biggest influence on their spending behaviour is pressure from their peers and the fear of being bullied for not 'fitting in'. Fear of bullying puts huge pressure on young people to look a certain way and to own certain things.

**Acceptance within friendship groups:** Conversely children and young people felt they wanted to dress like their friends as it gives them a sense of belonging within their friendship networks. The pressure therefore to 'fit in' is an equally important element to their spending decisions.

**The influence of celebrities:** This does not emerge as much of an influence as expected within the research sample. Whilst celebrities play a part to a degree in some children's and young people's decision making, for others it is the celebrities' personality that they are interested in, rather than the material items they are endorsing.

**The fear of being perceived as poor:** One of the key issues in the research is concern from children and young people not to appear like they do not have much money or are considered 'poor'. Whilst this has not come out strongly in the results, it is a common underlying theme in the answers and discussions.

**Awareness of commercialisation:** There is an overarching feeling that children and young people know that the commercial world targets them in many different ways, however they do not see this as a problem. Young people in particular see this as an inevitable part of the modern economy. Younger children and young people feel that they are more equipped than older young people to deal with it as they are more familiar with technology and therefore more 'savvy'.

**Commercialisation is not limited to children only:** Children and young people think adults are under the same pressures as children and young people to own certain items. Even though adults experience the same sort of pressure as children and young people, the world has changed so much since they were young that children and young people do not think adults fully understand or are even aware of the pressure children and young people feel under and the implications of these pressures.

## Who completed the survey?

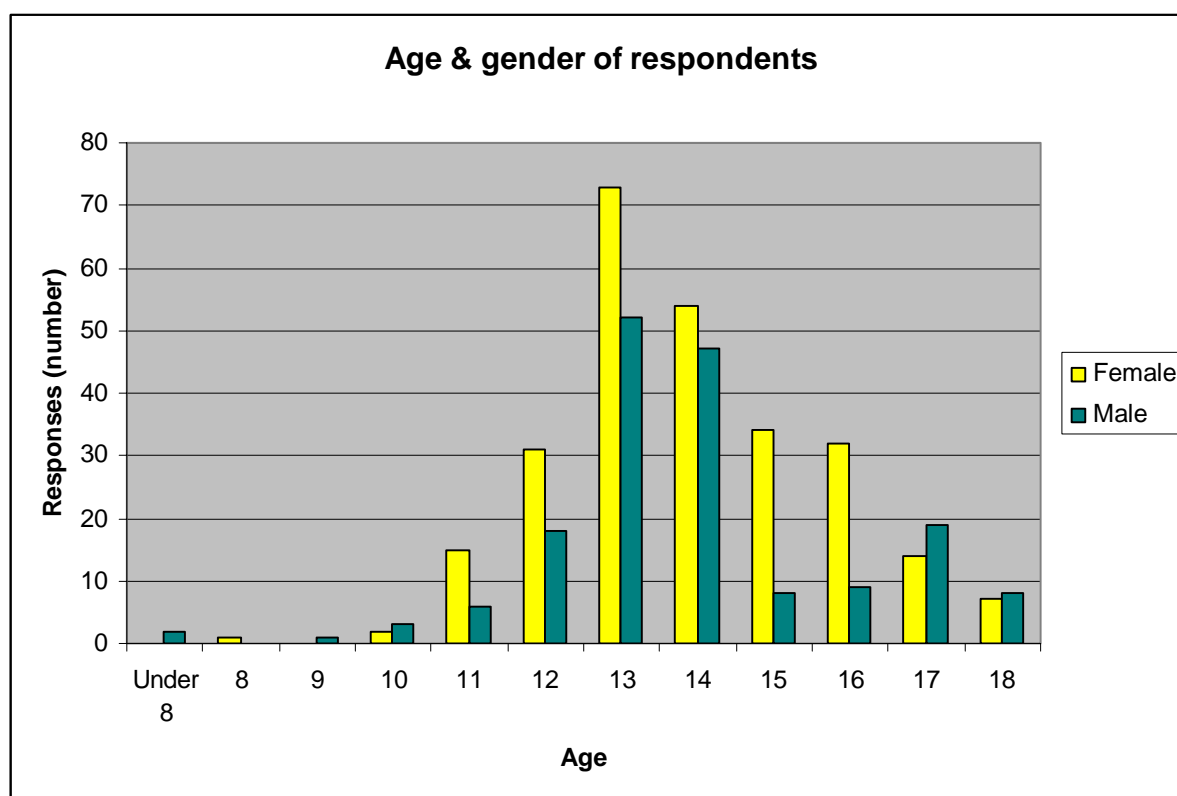
A total of 552 children and young people took part in the survey in January 2011. Not all respondents completed the whole survey and numbers varied across questions. The demographic questions were at the end of the survey and a total 460 respondents answered these questions.

### Age

The majority of those who completed the questionnaire were 13 but all other ages had a very good response, decreasing at both extremes. 80% are aged between 12 and 16.

### Gender

272 (60%) female, 178 (40 %) male.



## Ethnicity

85% White, British – very small response from other ethnic groups. This compares with between 21-25% of compulsory school aged children in England described as minority ethnic origin.

<b>Q24 Ethnicity – how would you best describe yourself?</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
White – British	85.3%	384
White – Irish	0.9%	4
White – Gypsy/Roma	0.4%	2
White – Irish Traveller	0.2%	1
White – Other	2.4%	11
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0.7%	3
Mixed – White and Black African	0.0%	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1.6%	7
Asian/Asian British – Indian	1.1%	5
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani	1.8%	8
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi	0.4%	2
Asian/Asian British – Chinese	1.3%	6
Black/Black British – Caribbean	0.0%	0
Black/Black British – African	1.6%	7
South-east Asian	0.4%	2
Black/White other	0.2%	1
Black/Asian	0.2%	1
White/Arabic	0.2%	1
Don't know	0.7%	3
Other	2.4%	1

## Education/work

91% go to school or college, 7% of those **also** have a paid job.

Which of the following best describes you? (tick all that apply)		
Answer options	Response per cent	Response count
Going to college or school	91%	503
In paid work (part-time)	7%	39
In paid work (full-time)	4%	24
Unemployed and looking for work	2%	12
On a training course or apprenticeship	2%	9
University	1%	4
Self employed	0%	2
Home educated	0%	1
Voluntary work	0%	1
Family business	0%	1
Something else	1%	4

NB: more than one response was possible.

## Disability

A total of 44 (10%) respondents describe themselves as having a disability of some sort. This compares with 3% of compulsory school aged children in England who have a Statement of Special Education needs and 18% who have special education needs without a Statement.

Disability	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	9.8%	44
No	90.2%	406

## Free School Meals (FSM)

A total of 47 (11%) respondents receive free school meals. This indicates these people may be from low income households. This compares with between 15-18% of school aged children in England who have Free School Meals.

Free school meals	Response Per cent	Response Count
Yes	10.9%	47
No	89.1%	384

## Geographic areas

We received responses from all regions of England, the largest being from the North East and smallest being the South West.

