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European Journal
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The impact of marketing on children's well-being in a digital age

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Manuscripts

Editorial: The impact of marketing on children's well-being in a digital age**Special Section of the European Journal of Marketing****Guest Editors:**

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One of the major considerations for marketers today is the need to examine their own practices when marketing to child audiences. The advent of immersive, digital and online platforms, so attractive to children of all ages, makes this need ever more urgent. The wealth of research on more traditional forms of communication, such as television advertising and print media, has yet to be balanced by research into newer forms, such as mobile applications, social networking sites, and advergames. When children's well-being is considered, the challenge becomes even more salient because of the nature of much of the marketing aimed at this audience. Recently published research focusing on digital marketing and children has featured largely in health promotion and food journals (e.g. Boelsen-Robinson et al., 2015; Cheyne et al., 2013; Folkvord, Anschutz, Buijzen, and Valkenburg, 2013; Hudson and Elliott, 2013; Kelly et al., 2015). With this special section of the European Journal of Marketing devoted to the impact that the digital age might have on the well-being of children, we place the debate firmly within the marketing discipline. Not simply in view of what products are promoted (although this is important, for example HFSS food products) but the impact upon the well-being of children and the knowledge they hold around new marketing strategies.

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3 How are children (and their parents) negotiating this dynamic environment and what exactly
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5 are marketers' strategies and responsibilities in this digital age?
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10 Today, children are increasingly sophisticated adopters and users of new media, however this
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12 digital environment arguably plays upon their vulnerability, particularly through the
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14 interactive, subtle and engaging nature of non-traditional advertising and marketing practices
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16 (Freeman and Shapiro, 2014). Academic knowledge of children's inherent limitations in
17
18 understanding advertising and their susceptibility to commercial persuasion before the age of
19
20 8-12 is well established (Rozendaal, Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2011). It is important to note
21
22 though, that much of this research relates to the more traditional forms of advertising and
23
24 fewer commercial media platforms (Gunter, Oates and Blades, 2005). Nowadays however,
25
26 children are increasingly embracing non-traditional media platforms such as interactive
27
28 games, social networking sites and branded websites (Vanwesenbeeck, Walrave and Konnet,
29
30 2016). These online platforms differ from traditional media in that they seek to offer children
31
32 the facility for play, entertainment and immersion in the overall experience over a longer
33
34 period of time (Verhellen, Oates, De Pelsmacker and Dens, 2014). A widely expressed
35
36 concern in the literature is that the embedded, interactive and entertaining capabilities of
37
38 online platforms can lead to commercial messages exerting more subtle and persuasive
39
40 effects on children, who also may not be fully aware of the nature and purpose of these
41
42 commercial messages (Owen, Lewis, Auty and Buijzen, 2013; Rozendaal, Buijzen and
43
44 Valkenburg, 2011). Given the appeal of new technologies to children and the integrated and
45
46 interactive nature of the commercial messages in them, it is important to re-visit children's
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48 abilities and vulnerabilities in this changing environment (Clarke and Svanaes, 2012).
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3 Little is actually known about the convergence of traditional and digital media and their
4 synergistic impact, or the extent and nature of children's engagement with commercial
5 messages in new media (Brown and Bobkowski, 2011; Montgomery, Grier, Chester and
6 Dorfman, 2011; Freeman and Shapiro, 2014; Panic, Cauberghe and De Pelsmacker, 2013).
7
8 Importantly, the substantial increase in children's digital media usage and its
9 characteristically interactive engagement is not matched by research that investigates the
10 risks of such exposure to children's social development and well-being (Clarke and Svanaes,
11 2012; Calvert, 2008), nor how families, educators or society can manage and support
12 children's digital media socialisation (Clarke and Svanaes, 2012). The literature
13 acknowledges a need for longitudinal studies that focus on the convergence of media, their
14 synergistic impact (Montgomery, Grier, Chester, and Dorfman, 2011; Brown and Bobkowski,
15 2011), and their long term impact on children's well-being, as well as research which
16 addresses the wider social and family contexts of class, gender, ethnicity, parental style and
17 media literacy (Buckingham, 2007). The papers chosen for this special section directly
18 address many of these concerns, in particular parental style (Bettany and Kerrane); media
19 literacy (Lawlor, Dunne and Rowley; Davis and Confos); and advertising's long term effects
20 on well-being (Oprea, Buijzen and van Reijmersdal).

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43 We put together this special section to identify novel research which advances our
44 understanding of marketing to children in this digital age, and what effect, if any, this might
45 have on their well-being. Our Call for Papers resulted in manuscripts being submitted from
46 countries across Asia, Australasia and Europe. These articles interpreted the Cfp in
47 interesting and diverse ways, involving a variety of approaches, theories, and methods. These
48 manuscripts underwent up to three rounds of peer review and revision before eventual
49 acceptance or rejection. The four that are included in this special section are all very different
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3 but have the common thread of providing insights into contemporary digital marketing
4 practices and the impact these have on children's well-being. They provoke considerations of
5 policy and practice, suggesting guidance to policymakers as they debate regulating the online,
6 commercial environment which raises very different issues to current offline advertising
7 regulations and policy.
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11 Here, we provide a summary of each article, presented in the order in which they appear in
12 the special section. The first paper begins by addressing the relationship between advertising
13 and well-being, and is followed by two papers which examine marketing strategies across
14 several different digital media platforms. The fourth paper moves the debate into new
15 territory by critically examining emerging mobile technologies in family life.
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30 The first paper entitled 'The impact of advertising on children's psychological wellbeing and
31 life satisfaction' by Oprea, Buijzen and van Reijmersdal directly addresses the topic of the
32 special section, asking whether advertising decreases children's well-being by examining the
33 relationship between advertising exposure, dimensions of psychological well-being and life
34 satisfaction. The study uses a large sample of 8-12 year olds and a longitudinal design,
35 allowing conclusions about the causal effects of advertising exposure. The paper reveals a
36 complex relationship between advertising, well-being and life satisfaction. For example, the
37 authors find advertising encourages some aspects of well-being, which in turn positively
38 influence life satisfaction (e.g. personal growth and autonomy) while others (e.g. purpose in
39 life), are negatively influenced. Further, advertising shows no relationship with self-
40 acceptance and positive relationships with others, which are important indicators for life
41 satisfaction. Oprea et al. conclude that it is too simple to state that all advertising is negative
42 as it may encourage some positive aspects of psychological well-being such as environmental
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3 mastery, personal growth, and autonomy. However they call for further longitudinal research
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5 looking at the accumulating effects of advertising on children's psychological well-being and
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7 life satisfaction.
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11 The second paper, by Davis and Confos entitled 'Young consumer-brand relationship
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13 building potential using digital marketing' identifies how six prominent food brands which
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15 advertise across three different digital marketing platforms, build and maintain brand
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17 relationships with children. Davis and Confos begin their paper by discussing the
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19 increasingly integrated role that digital media plays in children's lives, outlining the clear
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21 increase in mobile and online advertising to children. The authors explore how brands are
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23 integrated in digital media, specifically how advergames and other website interactions are
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25 used to persuade and influence brand attitudes. They focus on the strategies used by food
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27 manufacturers in digital media to communicate to young consumers and the potential for
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29 brand relationship building between food brands and younger consumers in this digital
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31 context. The paper reports on a content analysis of six food companies (mostly producers of
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33 HFSS foods) across three digital media platforms: Facebook, advergames, and mobile
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35 applications. Analysis of these platforms uncovers four common strategies adopted by
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37 marketers, which Davis and Confos argue clearly demonstrate a 'relationship-building thrust
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39 to the branding strategy': brand as a prize (positive brand reinforcement through the brand as
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41 a reward); brand as educator/entertainer (play with the brand online); brand as social enabler
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43 (make friends and social networks through the brand); and brand as a person (brand
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45 personification). Davis and Confos conclude that in the context of the online environment,
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47 the brand is an interactive partner with assigned human qualities, engaging in a two-way
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49 relationship with children, for example through direct posts and tweets. Davis and Confos
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51 discuss policy implications within the context of children's well-being and conclude that the
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3 next stage needs to be talking to the young consumers themselves to understand more fully
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5 their engagement with the brands in this online context.
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11 The research undertaken by Lawlor, Dunne and Rowley, entitled 'Young consumers' brand
12 communications literacy in a social networking site context' appropriately follows the paper
13 by Davis and Confos by talking to children themselves about online branding. Their paper
14 addresses the gap in the literature with regard to children's commercial awareness and
15 advertising literacy in the context of online social networking sites (SNS). Lawlor, Dunne
16 and Rowley's paper provides a fascinating insight into the social media branded lives of 12-
17 14 year old girls in Ireland. The primary aim of this study is to explore the nature and extent
18 of advertising literacy amongst the girls in the context of their use of online social networking
19 sites. Their findings reinforce the concern that younger consumers have difficulty identifying
20 the nature of advertising in the context of a non-traditional medium in comparison to
21 traditional media such as television. The participants have a very narrow view of what
22 constitutes commercial content in a social networking environment, and more compellingly,
23 they are unaware of the behavioural changes that advertisers sought to bring about in them,
24 such as brand-related, sharing behaviours. As such, the authors express concern for the well-
25 being of 12-14 year olds, who are potentially vulnerable to commercial and other exploitation
26 as they have not met a key criterion of commercial literacy, namely an ability to understand
27 the commercial agenda of the marketer. The authors also recognise the need for a new
28 conceptualisation of advertising literacy in an online context which is informed by the
29 increasing convergence of traditional online advertising and other forms of online brand
30 content. Hence, they propose the Online Brand Communications (OBC) literacy framework.
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32 The study has implications for public policy in that further attention needs to be given to how
33 children are being educated about the range of advertising techniques and marketing formats.
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3 The study also questions whether traditional consumer socialisation literature which
4 considers 11-16 year olds as knowledgeable, reflective and sophisticated is still true in the
5 digital environment and calls for more research on children's perspectives on new forms of
6 advertising.
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15 The fourth paper, by Bettany and Kerrane entitled 'The socio-materiality of parental style:
16 negotiating the multiple affordances of parenting and child welfare within the new child
17 surveillance technology market', takes the reader on a stimulating journey into quite a
18 different context of the digital world and its impact upon the well-being of children, with an
19 analysis of parental style and child welfare in relation to child surveillance technologies
20 (CST) – specifically child GPS trackers (CGT). Bettany and Kerrane introduce us to various
21 examples of CGT, along with a critical review of the marketing of CGT products to children
22 and parents. They go on to argue that although we might associate the helicopter parental
23 style with the adoption of CGT, we in fact need to develop the parental style literature to
24 account for such emerging mobile technologies – which afford parents the ability to act at a
25 distance. Bettany and Kerrane approach this from a socio-material theoretical lens –
26 specifically the authors combine neutralization and affordance theory to explain their data.
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The methodology for this paper involves netnography on relevant online communities - multiple online sites and forums are analysed over a 12 month period, including news sites, product launch forums, product review sites and popular parental forums. Results of the netnography are positioned under three main areas: online criticisms directed at parents who use or might use CGT; the techniques used by parents to counteract such criticism (drawing upon neutralization theory); and finally how parental purchasers re-afford the technology. By taking this particular theoretical and methodological approach, the authors provide us with new knowledge on parental styles and contribute to the theory of new product adoption

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3 (particularly this controversial new digital technology). Bettany and Kerrane conclude with a
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5 conceptual shift away from parental style, towards parental affordances – uncovering how
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7 ‘being a good parent’ is played out in the context of new child surveillance technologies.
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13 In conclusion, as editors of this special section of the European Journal of Marketing, we
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15 hope that this collection of papers will inspire new research and further insights into this
16
17 important area. We thank the ten authors of these four papers, and also acknowledge the hard
18
19 work of all the authors who submitted their paper for consideration in this issue. We also
20
21 thank all the reviewers who generously provided their time, expertise and feedback
22
23 throughout the whole process.
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