



EFFECTIVELY EMBEDDED

SCHOOLS AND THE MACHINERY OF MODERN MARKETING THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALIZING TRENDS: 2009-2010

Alex Molnar and Faith Boninger
Arizona State University

Gary Wilkinson
University of Hull, Hull, England

Joseph Fogarty
Corballa National School, County Sligo, Ireland

Sean Geary
Arizona State University

National Education Policy Center

School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder
Boulder, CO 80309-0249
Telephone: 303-735-5290
Fax: 303-492-7090

Email: NEPC@colorado.edu
<http://nepc.colorado.edu>

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Executive Summary

In the context of the **last two years'** recession, parents, teachers and administrators seem to increasingly welcome school-business “partnerships” **that they hope** may help ward off program cuts. Businesses encourage such arrangements because school-based marketing and advertising programs are perfectly poised to “brand” children at an early age: the school environment is relatively uncluttered, children are a captive and credulous audience, and marketing and advertising programs are normalized and lent legitimacy when they are embedded into the school context.

Embedded advertising, in the forms of product placement and consumer events, is not new, but it has become the dominant advertising medium in 2010 and continues to expand. When advertising is embedded in a film, music video, or school activity, it is entwined with content that children seek out and engage with for extended periods of time. In schools, embedded advertising appears in such activities as corporate-sponsored contests, programs, lesson plans, and fundraising efforts. Students are generally unable to avoid these activities; moreover, they tend to assume that what their teachers and schools present to them is in their best interest. Adolescents, traditionally considered the least vulnerable of children, may in fact be more vulnerable than their younger counterparts because their developmental stage makes them more susceptible to embedded advertising that targets their identity formation and reduced impulse control.

Most significantly, embedded advertising works—so much so that corporations are willing to spend billions of dollars on it annually. Often when stakeholders consider the pros and cons of bringing commercial programs into schools, they rationalize that children are already exposed to so much marketing and advertising in their out-of-school lives that a little more won't hurt them—particularly if it brings needed money into the schools. This report examines the psychology of embedded advertising to show how it does, in fact, both influence children's brand attitudes and harm them psychologically in a variety of ways. Advertising makes children want more, eat more, and think that their self-worth can and should come from commercial products. It heightens their insecurities, distorts their gender socialization, and displaces the development

of values and activities other than those associated with commercialism. Its greatest advantage is that stakeholders, including the children themselves, discount its effectiveness.

Despite the foothold that marketing and advertising currently have in schools, opposition this year in the United States, England and Ireland demonstrate that committed advocates can effectively challenge educators to evaluate and justify the commercial promotions they allow in their schools. Discussion and concern about the fairness of embedded advertising in entertainment contexts has led to talk of how to regulate it on television. Attention to and concern about embedded advertising should also inform conversations about the policies that enable school-based marketing programs and about the potential of those marketing programs to harm children.

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Introduction

Marketing and advertising continued to touch almost every aspect of children’s lives in 2009-2010. Moreover, the economic recession of the last several years appears to have resulted in intensified corporate marketing efforts in schools, as parents, teachers and administrators welcome “partnerships” that they think may help avoid program cuts.

By their very nature, advertising and marketing activities promote the values of commercialism. And although definitions of commercialism may vary in their particulars, they all suggest in one way or another an excessive emphasis on consumption.¹ This emphasis is especially troubling not only because students are a captive audience, but also because it places the interests of marketers and their clients over and above the best interests of students.

Focus of This Year’s Report

For the past several years, our reports on schoolhouse commercialism have explored the “total environment” of advertising to children. We described, for example, the extent to which advertising and editorial content have become blurred, with strategies that target children becoming ever more persuasive and interactive.²

The cutting-edge approach to marketing is now “embedded advertising.” In its original context, television and film, embedded advertising included both “product placement,” products appearing as props, and “product integration,” products being mentioned in the dialogue or the plot of a program, or both.³ Considered the future of marketing, embedded advertising in dialogue and plot has skyrocketed in the United States and internationally.⁴ Although popular with marketers, the approach has come under attack for several reasons, among them the perceived unfairness of advertising to viewers without their awareness and the abuse of the creative process as writers are required to organize story lines around products.⁵

Our 2008-2009 report analyzed digital marketing to children, especially the ways that digital marketing programs in school serve as an entrée to expose children to further digital marketing outside of school. Much digital advertising is embedded in websites that appear to serve some non-commercial purpose, like homework help, research support, or games.⁶ Product placements that start in another medium are typically reinforced by an Internet presence. For example, songs, music videos, or films with integrated products can be found as clips on YouTube, and countless products now have their own websites and Facebook pages.⁷

Advertising done in a school context is, by definition, “embedded.” **And although children, like adults, tend to believe that advertising does not affect them, research demonstrates that it does.**⁸ Moreover, we believe the available evidence strongly suggests that when schools participate in marketing programs, students are exposed to psychological harm. This report examines both the persuasion processes by which embedded advertising in schools influences children and the varieties of psychological harm it causes.

Methods

This year we identified and reviewed key documents, publications and websites associated with advertising and marketing, health care and nutrition, government policy, education, and academic research (see Appendix). Relevant material from these sources was, in turn, used to develop further lines of investigation. In addition, Gary Wilkinson and Joseph Fogarty’s reports on developments in England and Ireland, respectively, are integrated into our analysis. When discussing advertising and marketing in a particular country, monetary values cited are given in the currency of that country.⁹

Embedded Advertising

Embedded advertising is not new. Early efforts included placements in silent films and a 1950s diamond marketing strategy disguised as newspaper articles about celebrity engagements.¹⁰ Currently, embedded advertising is primarily associated with “branded entertainment,” a marketing approach that blends advertising and entertainment in the form of live consumer events or the placement of products into the content of selected media.¹¹

Branded entertainment is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. The marketing research firm PQ Media reports that, internationally, \$48.34 billion was spent on consumer events in 2009, and \$6.25 billion on product placements.¹² The United States accounted for 45.1% of global spending: in 2009, \$21.02 billion was spent in the United States on consumer events and \$3.61 billion on product placements.¹³

Researchers at PQ Media observe that branded entertainment strategies have “evolved at a frenetic pace” in the past decade because they do, in fact, work.¹⁴ This is why they expect spending on branded entertainment to continue to **grow through 2014, “as brands pursue marketing strategies that engage consumers more effectively than traditional media.”**¹⁵ Not only is it pervasive, but it blurs the distinction between advertising and content and promotes the development of an interactive relationship between marketers and consumers, particularly children. It allows consumers to personally interact with brands and build emotional connections with them. These emotional connections encourage brand awareness, positive attitudes toward brands, and purchase intention.¹⁶ In other words, embedded advertising encapsulates the marketing trends we have reported on in previous years.¹⁷

Embedded Advertising in Schools

Commercialism in schools tends to fall into seven overlapping categories: (1) sponsorship of school programs, (2) exclusive agreements, (3) sponsorship of incentive programs, (4)

appropriation of space on school property, (5) sponsorship of supplementary educational materials, (6) fundraising, and (7) digital marketing.¹⁸ Each category encompasses a wide array of strategies. For example, advertising can involve after-school activities (sponsored by a corporation), class-based projects (using sponsored educational materials, perhaps in conjunction with a branded website), contests (with prizes sponsored by a corporation), and beverage and snack sales (from vending machines that appropriate school space to sell certain brands exclusively).

School-based advertising is inherently embedded. When brands appear in activities, lessons, special programs, or even as the name of a sponsored sports field or the school itself, they are embedded into the school context.¹⁹ Corporations suggest that their efforts are good for children and schools, primarily because they offer such enticements as money, equipment, or prizes in exchange for access to students. Especially popular now are efforts that appear to promote environmental concerns (including recycling, conservation, and reduced energy use) and healthy lifestyles (including sports, food and cookery).²⁰ The following examples from each of the categories of school commercialism show the nature of embedded advertising in schools in 2009-2010.

Sponsored Programs and Activities

Corporations subsidize school programs or one-time events in return for the right to associate their names with those activities, providing ideal opportunities to create positive images for their brands. For example, the Fuel Our Future Now (<http://www.fuelourfuturenow.com>) website presents, along with its marquee “X Prize Contest,” the “DASH+ Contest” for high school students.²¹ This program offers high school teams the chance to design and pitch an automobile dashboard concept. The grand prize is a trip to Detroit, which may include a “close-up look at the Ford Rouge Factory Tour that is part of the Dearborn Truck Plant, where the F-150 truck is built.”²² The website, contest, and other materials associated with it are sponsored by Progressive Automotive, Discovery Education, the U.S. Department of Energy, and the X-Prize Foundation. Sponsors’ logos are prominent on the website’s page headings and on materials.

An Irish program demonstrates how Internet-based social marketing can be integrated into a sponsored program. Allied Irish Bank’s (AIB) “Build a Bank Challenge” again this year recruited teenage students to promote its brand by hiring teens in school-based bank branches.²³ To compete regionally against other in-school branches, student teams produced a marketing plan focused on “account recruitment and sustainment,” using all their ingenuity to convince other students to bank with AIB. One team used the social networking website *Bebo* to publicize the grand opening of its branch and an accompanying fancy dress competition. Students were reminded of the benefits of opening an AIB account and **offered an extra €20 mobile phone credit to sign up for Internet banking.**²⁴

Exclusive Agreements

Exclusive agreements between schools and corporations give corporations the exclusive right to sell and promote their goods or services in the school or district. In return, the school or district

receives a percentage of the resulting profits. A modern example is the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association's (WIAA's) exclusive agreement with When We Were Young Productions to stream high school sporting events over the Internet. Local newspapers that wanted to stream the events sued the WIAA on the grounds that the WIAA was infringing upon the First Amendment freedom of the press. However, a federal judge ruled in 2010 that the WIAA was not silencing the press but rather was in an agreement to increase revenue from the games; that is, that the issue was one of commerce rather than free speech.²⁵

Sponsored Educational Materials

Sometimes, corporations or trade associations provide schools with materials that claim to have **instructional content**. In the early twentieth century these materials were called “propaganda,” but now they are commonly referred to using the more benign term “sponsored educational materials.”

The oil company BP has been active internationally in creating curriculum materials designed to promote its “green” credentials. In the United States, it was one of several corporate and other partners that wrote California's brand-new environmental curriculum.²⁶ In the United Kingdom, BP's extensive dedicated education website offers all manner of educational resources for schools on science, geography, environmental studies, citizenship, engineering and enterprise, among other topics. **The website demonstrates the company's “responsibility to ensure that our educational resources reflect our focus on energy, environment, leadership and business skills.”**²⁷ In addition to these sponsored educational materials offered to British schoolteachers, BP conducts workshops on earth science for school children in the Natural History Museum.²⁸

Incentive Programs

In return for students, parents, or staff engaging in specified activities, corporate-sponsored incentive programs offer various rewards to students, schools, or districts. **Incentives include** money, goods, or services. For example, the Sunny Delight Beverages company timed its second annual “SunnyD Book Spree” for the recent back-to-school season (August to November, 2010). Schools collecting and submitting the most SunnyD proofs-of-purchase (or simply index cards with a “proof” notation) won up to \$2,000 worth of company-selected books. All schools that sent in 20 proofs received 20 books.²⁹ A television advertising campaign supported the promotion, and the brand website encouraged parents to create supporting Facebook groups, to post signs in local sites like supermarkets and libraries, and to bring SunnyD products to classroom and other student parties.³⁰

In England and Ireland, the most popular incentive programs offer vouchers. Unlike popular “scrip” programs in the United States, in which supermarkets and other large chains (such as Target) return a small percentage of their receipts in cash, these programs offer vouchers in return for purchases. The vouchers collected during a campaign can then be exchanged for products that schools want. **In Ireland, for example, €36,300 worth of Tesco sales would earn enough voucher credit for a digital camera, or €299,000 would earn enough for a laptop.**³¹

Fundraising

For the past 30 years the trend has been for schools to form “partnerships” with businesses to help with fundraising. Now, with schools further in distress as a result of the most recent recession, the demand for these “partnerships” is greater than ever. Fundraising programs include door-to-door sales and affinity marketing campaigns. For example, the Houston Independent School District encourages families to enroll in Power for Schools (<http://www.powerforschools.org>). The program asks families to register with a participating energy provider, which in turn makes a donation to the school district for each family that opts into the program.³² Companies such as Easy Fundraising Ideas (<http://www.easyfundraisingideas.com>) market fundraising sales campaigns for myriad products to schools and other nonprofit organizations.

Appropriation of Space

In appropriation of space agreements, schools receive money in exchange for allowing corporations to place their names, logos, or advertising messages in school space, such as on scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, textbooks, or school buses. For example, Frostproof Elementary School in Polk County, Fla., asks local businesses to sponsor classrooms in exchange for ads on the school marquee. Rogers and Walker Gun Shop, for example, received marquee space for donating \$300 to two classrooms.³³

In England, retail giant Tesco expanded its voucher campaign to incorporate an increased branding of school space. Tesco’s new “Banner Competition” encourages “schools and clubs across the country to display their Tesco for Schools & Clubs banners loud and proud.”³⁴ Schools that comply and submit photos become eligible for a weekly drawing for bonus vouchers—awarded to only a small percentage of participating schools. Photos of Tesco banners displayed in schools are posted on the program’s website.³⁵

Digital Marketing

As we have seen, digital marketing weaves in and around other forms of marketing, both in schools and outside of them.³⁶ Program details and sponsored educational materials for Fuel Our Future Now are available on-line, and high school sporting events are streamed online through the **Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association’s (WIAA’s) exclusive agreement with When We Were Young Productions**. A digital presence for marketing initiatives is integral to their success for several reasons: (1) children spend a lot of time, much of it unsupervised, on the Internet; (2) they can voluntarily access marketing sites; (3) their time spent on marketing sites is unlimited; and (4) much digital marketing is interactive. Unlike the old, passively ingested 30-second commercials that could easily be missed during a snack or bathroom break, digital marketing actively engages its targets in brand-related activity over a protracted period of time.

In-school efforts can nudge students toward Internet-based marketing outside of school.³⁷ Google, for example, introduces students to its Internet environment by providing an advertising-free service for schools, “Google Apps for Education,” that provides filtered e-mail,

online documents, website creation, streaming media and other applications. Moreover, it allows users to collaborate in real time through “cloud computing,” using online software and Google for data storage and management. In Oregon, which began using the service statewide in April 2010, Department of Education spokeswoman Susanne Smith said, “This is a way for students to prepare for the workplace by using workplace technology in the classroom”³⁸—that is, to prepare for using Google technology in the workplace. And outside of the school service, of course, Google is far from advertising-free.³⁹

How Advertising Works: Understanding Persuasion Processes

People Think Advertising Does Not Affect Them

Despite data that demonstrate the effectiveness of advertising on attitudes, purchase intentions, and behavior, children and adults commonly—and mistakenly—feel personally exempt from advertising’s **influence**.⁴⁰ The most significant harm done by advertising is carried out “under the radar”: advertising not only persuades people to buy more, but also convinces them that they can derive identity, fulfillment, and self-expression through what they buy.⁴¹ In addition to promoting a particular product, every advertisement reinforces this underlying assumption, which is central to our consumer culture. That this message is invisible makes it all the more effective, because no one ever thinks to question it.⁴²

Research on persuasion processes provides evidence that marketing to children is far from inconsequential, but rather something to address seriously for the “collateral damage” it does to children on its way to influencing their purchase behaviors.⁴³ Until recently, analyses of how children respond to advertising have primarily explored the question of what level of cognitive development enables children to understand persuasive intent and, at least theoretically, to resist direct marketing attempts.⁴⁴ These analyses assumed that if children could recognize advertising as an attempt to persuade them, and if they could actively argue against it, the advertising was “fair.” If children could not recognize persuasive intent and formulate counter-arguments, then the advertising was “not fair.” This was the basis of the American Psychological Association’s recommendation to restrict advertising to children under the ages of 7-8.⁴⁵ Research findings had suggested that younger children perceive ads as factual and neither recognize nor defend against persuasive intent. This approach assumes that the process by which advertising works is a fully conscious one, and that it is subject to conscious control. Several lines of research, however, suggest that even when children (or adolescents, or even adults) are cognitively able to recognize persuasive intent, advertising still influences them.⁴⁶

Peripheral Persuasion

Since the mid-1970s, psychologists have distinguished between advertising seeking to persuade via direct argument and advertising using more peripheral (or heuristic) strategies. These include, for example, promoting a good mood and liking for an ad or product by provoking laughter, or evoking trust in a product by showcasing a popular spokesperson—or simply

saturating a target audience with repeated exposure to an ad. Such peripheral effects are not logical and often influence people without their awareness.⁴⁷

Narrative Persuasion

Because peripheral strategies can be undermined if the audience is aware of and actively argues against a persuasive message, corporations have been interested in undermining such resistance—which helps explain why embedded advertising has become so popular. Recent research focusing on “narrative persuasion” demonstrates that when people are transported into a story (as in a movie, a book, or videogame) and are exposed to persuasive attempts in the context of that story, they tend not to counter-argue those attempts—and are effectively persuaded.⁴⁸ Research findings are consistent with predictions that persuasion through transportation into a story is likely to be persistent over time, resistant to change, and predictive of behavior.⁴⁹ Embedded advertising capitalizes on these narrative effects.

Implicit Persuasion

Some advertising bypasses cognitive processing completely by activating automatic behavioral scripts, associations, or emotions. In 2004, the market research company Harris Interactive advised its clients that children’s affinity for brands is made on an emotional (non-cognitive) level and that as children get older they seek rational support for choices they have already made on an emotional basis.⁵⁰ Published data support this claim: children as young as two years old recognize brand logos on product packages,⁵¹ and children as young as three years old not only recognize brands but also use them in socially meaningful ways.⁵² They judge their peers as popular or unpopular, or fun or boring, because of the brands they use, and they draw inferences about consumers of different brands of food.⁵³

It is possible that there are automatic processes specifically concerning food. After all, food is a biological necessity, and an argument can be made that people have become hard-wired to respond to food cues in their environment. Food products dominate advertising and marketing to children in and out of school,⁵⁴ and reviews of research on food marketing to children indicate that advertising influences children’s food preferences, purchasing, and consumption—with or without their conscious awareness.⁵⁵ Research on school food environments, in particular, found that student snack food purchases were significantly associated with the number of snack machines in school.⁵⁶ Similarly, a 2009 National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) study of ninth grade children found that a fast food restaurant within a tenth of a mile of their school was associated with a 5.2% increase in obesity rates.⁵⁷

Of course, it’s easier to buy when food is more available, but recent research also demonstrates that the mere presence of snack machines and fast food restaurants may encourage students to eat by activating snacking scripts.⁵⁸ Jennifer Harris and her colleagues let children ages 7 to 11 eat a snack while watching a cartoon that contained advertising either for food or for other products. Those children who saw food advertising ate 45% more of the snack. In a follow-up experiment, adult participants who were exposed to “fun” snack food advertising ate more snack foods than participants who were exposed to other advertising. Especially interesting in these

experiments, and consistent with claims that the underlying message of advertising is to reinforce the values of consumption,⁵⁹ is that food advertising increased consumption of food products other than the ones in the advertisements. These consumption effects were not related to reported hunger or other conscious influences. Automatic effects like this may be especially pernicious and difficult to defend against.⁶⁰

Exploitation of Adolescents' Psychological Vulnerabilities

Adolescents, in particular, are vulnerable to ads that target their identity-formation processes.⁶¹ Traditionally, it has been considered “fair” to market to teenagers because they are old enough to recognize and evaluate the persuasive intention of an advertisement.⁶² Although this may be **true to the extent that teenagers recognize an advertisement’s persuasive intent and so fully** discount it in the context of a highly logical assessment of the product involved, the research referenced above indicates that people of all ages are subject to strategies that inhibit or bypass such a logical evaluation of the advertisement and product. In addition, recent research has found that developmentally, teenagers have reduced ability to control impulsive behaviors and to resist immediate gratification. This increases their susceptibility to peer influence and image advertising.⁶³ Digital advertising is particularly well-suited to exploit these developmental tendencies.⁶⁴ On the web, for example, a purchase is only a click away from any advertisement. Marketing strategies that collect data about users in order to match advertising to their computer use histories and other personal information further exploit the vulnerabilities of adolescents.⁶⁵

For example, Facebook’s “like” feature, which allows users to click a button to endorse an item, ensures that teen users are regularly informed of their peers’ brand preferences. Although Facebook users can “like” anything (including their friends’ statuses, groups, and brands), Facebook and marketers have united to make sure that brands are easy to “like”: brand websites now contain buttons that visitors can click to post their opinions about the brand to their Facebook friends.⁶⁶ At Nielsen’s Consumer 360 conference in June 2010, Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg cited a study that found that people who receive product recommendations from their friends are 400% more likely to buy that product, and that compared with products not recommended by friends, friend-recommended products are associated with 68% better product recognition and 200% greater memory of brand messaging.⁶⁷

How Advertising Harms Children

Children are now exposed to hundreds, if not thousands, of ads daily.⁶⁸ Indeed, the ubiquity of ads often serves as a rationale for even further exposure. When considering whether to allow a particular advertising program in a school district, well-meaning parents, administrators, and policymakers commonly argue, “Well, what’s the harm? Children see so many ads anyway; what’s this one more going to do to them, especially when allowing it will help us pay for needed programs?” In other words, if there’s no harm, then there’s no need to restrict advertising in schools. Our analysis suggests, however, that marketing and advertising to children does harm

them. Specifically, advertising and marketing negatively influence children's self-esteem, body image, peer relations, and general well-being.⁶⁹

Workers in youth-related fields tend to consider advertising rampant and harmful to children.⁷⁰ Even among marketers there are concerns. A 2004 Harris Interactive poll of 878 individuals working in the youth marketing industry (primarily youth marketing, advertising and public relations, and media) found that only 30% of respondents thought children were “well-equipped to deal with the current media and advertising environment.” Only 24% thought the industry was “policing itself sufficiently in terms of advertising appropriately to children,” just 28% thought that current ratings systems are effective, and 80% favored regulating how companies use information they collect from young people.⁷¹ However, the same respondents thought it appropriate to advertise to children several years before the age that they thought those children could actually make intelligent decisions as consumers. They felt an urgency in their industry to familiarize young children with brands.

Heightened Insecurity

Psychologist Helga Dittmar and her colleagues have extensively researched the effects on children of consumer culture and what they call “the new materialism.” They define “new materialism” as not simply an interest in things or a value for things, but rather as “the pursuit of happiness through money and material goods.”⁷² They point out that children, through their immersion in consumer culture, internalize the twin ideals emphasized by that culture: the “good life” and the “body perfect.” Research finds that this internalization creates insecurities in children about their bodies and their very selves.⁷³ These insecurities are mediated by discrepancies between children's real bodies and lives and the ideal images they see around them—in toys, television shows, music videos, and advertisements.⁷⁴ Girls as young as five years old report wanting a thinner body.⁷⁵ Ironically, with increasing rates of childhood obesity, these “real-ideal discrepancies” may become more extreme.

Dittmar points out that consumer culture creates vulnerability in children by causing them to feel far away from their ideal and to feel bad about this gap, and then exploits the vulnerability it creates by presenting solutions (products) that purportedly can repair children's identity deficits and negative emotions—which, of course, they cannot. For example, Old Spice's advertisements featuring football and rap stars explaining that Old Spice transformed them from super-nerds to super-cool promises that the product can do the same for the boys who buy it.⁷⁶ Other products are similarly branded: Anthony's Body Essentials come in such variations as “Energy,” “Strength,” “Spirit,” and “Courage”; and Abercrombie & Fitch sells a popular cologne called “Fierce.”⁷⁷

The effects on children are both psychological and behavioral: lower self-esteem, more dissatisfaction, more eating disorders, and more compulsive shopping.⁷⁸ Most vulnerable are children who feel greater pressure to conform to their peer culture. In one set of studies published in 2008, children who felt more pressure to conform both scored higher on a materialism scale and were more likely to believe that peers would reject a fictional character who didn't get a new pair of popular athletic shoes.⁷⁹

Distorted Gender Socialization

The marketing of body products to children leads to early and disturbing effects on children's gender socialization. Boys and girls learn from marketing messages that "hypersexuality" is normal and appropriate, and that sexuality is a commodity that can and should be bought.⁸⁰ Spending patterns demonstrate the effectiveness of these messages. In 2007, the market research company Packaged Facts estimated that spending on hair care, skin care and color cosmetics products by and for preteens and teenagers reached \$7 billion (retail); the company predicted that amount would rise to \$8.5 billion by 2012.⁸¹ Self-care brands have increased sales to boys in the 10-to-14 age range through such "underground" marketing techniques as tie-ins on social networking and Internet gaming sites, interactive websites, and giveaways in school health education classes. A 2010 New York Times article reports:

Tag has a page on Facebook. Axe has an avatar in Pain, a PlayStation game. Swagger sponsors Xbox team competitions. Dial for Men offers advice from "sexperts." Brands create downloadable apps, have lengthy "advergames" on their Web sites, and urge fans to text friends with coy messages about the products. They make commercials just for YouTube, which is, in turn, filled with commercials made by boys themselves.⁸²

More evidence of the effectiveness of this advertising comes from Axe's "Wake-up Service" advertising campaign in Japan, which landed on the short list for the 2010 Warc Prize for advertising.⁸³ The campaign—which led to an increase in repeat purchases of over 65% —gets to **young men first thing in the morning by enlisting them to subscribe to a daily "wake-up call" on their cell phones from a young woman whispering "Don't forget to spray Axe today."**⁸⁴ Psychologist and author Lyn Mikel Brown claims that such products preach an extreme, singular definition of masculinity at a time in their development when boys are grappling **uneasily with identity. She says that these products "cultivate anxiety in boys at younger and younger ages about what it means to man up, to be the kind of boy they're told girls will want and other boys will respect. They're playing with the failure to be that kind of guy, to be heterosexual even."**⁸⁵

Displaced Values and Activities

Consumer culture pre-empts development of other interests that may be more functional. Psychologist Allen Kanner notes that

The more that people believe they need an endless array of material goods to be happy...the more time that is devoted to consuming—from making money, to worrying about making money, to shopping, to thinking about consuming, either through exposure to advertising or fantasizing about new purchases—the less time is devoted to activities that satisfy non-material needs—family and friends, creative and artistic endeavors, spiritual practices, etc.⁸⁶

This displacement may be more serious for children than for adults: when consumer-oriented activity displaces unstructured, child-directed creative play, it is the development of creative thinking and spirituality that are pushed out.⁸⁷ Consumer culture may not only make children unhappy by highlighting their distance from an idealized life and body as noted above, but it

may also prevent them from cultivating interests and practices that would distract from, or counteract, their unhappiness. This situation is consistent with correlations found between higher materialistic values and higher rates of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, chronic physical symptoms, and lower self-esteem.⁸⁸ In teenagers, higher materialistic values also correlate with increased smoking, drinking, drug use, weapon carrying, vandalism and truancy.⁸⁹

Opposition to School Commercialism

There has been consistent resistance to advertising to children over the years.⁹⁰ In the United States, the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) and its partners spearheaded campaigns that led Scholastic Inc. to stop selling sexualized Bratz doll books in schools in September 2008 and that led BusRadio to stop operating one year later, after it was criticized by the Federal Communications Commission.⁹¹ Most recently, in September 2010, CCFC was instrumental in mobilizing parents to lobby San Diego school board members to vote against advertising in schools.⁹²

In the United Kingdom, in February 2010, the press reported that children as young as seven were being recruited, trained, and rewarded to surreptitiously market products to their friends. This led Tory Prime Ministerial candidate David Cameron to speak out against the excessive commercialization of childhood.⁹³ He promised that his administration would suspend Government contracts with marketing agencies that aggressively marketed to children, ban the practice of peer-to-peer marketing techniques targeted at children, and work with head teachers to terminate contracts between schools and vending machine firms.⁹⁴ At the time of this publication, a task force had been set up to discuss these issues, but no policy announcements had been made.

U.K. parents are also increasingly aware of the branding of public space in and around schools. A 2009 report by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport indicated that some parents expressed more concern about space appropriation than about mainstream media advertising.⁹⁵

In Ireland, Independent Newspapers ran a primary school incentive program, **“Building for the Future,”** that generated national outrage at the manipulation of school children. The competition, which was co-sponsored by the Bank of Ireland, was claimed to be **“Ireland’s biggest primary schools competition”** and **“one of the largest collaborative projects in Ireland”** and had been endorsed by the former Prime Minister.⁹⁶ To participate in the program, a school was required to submit 20 tokens per student; the tokens were to appear in Independent newspapers during January – April 2010.⁹⁷ This drew immediate criticism from the Irish **National Teachers Organization (INTO), which described it as a “new low in trying to target school children for commercial gain.”**⁹⁸ In addition, 50 primary school principals signed a statement criticizing Independent Newspapers for posturing as benefactors while, in reality, **“seeking to exploit schools, boost sales and make life uncomfortable for children whose parents do not buy the sponsors [sic] newspapers.”**⁹⁹ Faced with sustained opposition and negative

media coverage, Independent Newspapers decided to remove the commercial stipulation altogether from the scheme, a first in the history of commercialism in Irish schools.¹⁰⁰

Government Regulations and Industry Self-Regulation

Food Marketing to Children

The opposition to advertising has prompted both government regulation and industry efforts to self-regulate. Noteworthy developments in the regulation of food marketing to American children include Congressional efforts to pass the Child Nutrition Bill of 2010 and the Federal **Trade Commission's (FTC's) increased aggressiveness in** monitoring food advertising to children. The Child Nutrition Bill, passed by the Senate in July 2010 but not yet by the House of Representatives, calls for application of to-be-defined nutritional standards to all foods sold in schools, including competitive foods such as those sold in school vending machines.¹⁰¹ First Lady Michelle Obama has strongly supported the bill as part of her "Let's Move" agenda.¹⁰²

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued warning letters to 11 companies in January 2010 for making misleading claims, for touting inadequately supported health-benefits, and for other similarly deceptive practices.¹⁰³ In June 2010, an official statement confirmed that the agency "will act swiftly to challenge questionable health claims **about children's food products,**" and agency officials have publicly criticized fast-food chains, including Yum Brands, Chuck E. Cheese and IHOP, for failing to participate in food industry self-regulation efforts.¹⁰⁴ In September 2010, the FTC issued subpoenas to 48 companies as part of its research for a follow-up to its 2008 report on food and beverage industry spending, methods and self-regulation with respect to food marketing to children.¹⁰⁵ According to the agency, the subpoenas are intended to measure the results of self-regulation and determine if stronger industry efforts are needed.¹⁰⁶

As of September 2010, 17 companies were participating in the **Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI)**, a self-regulation effort that began in 2006. The participating companies pledge not to use product placement in child-directed editorial or program content, not to advertise foods and beverages in schools through sixth grade, and to restrict use of **third-party licensed characters in children's advertising to products meeting their own pledged "better for you" product nutrition criteria.** Although the companies meet their own self-determined criteria, they have not signed on to a uniform set of standards.¹⁰⁷

Other self-regulation of food sales in schools produced the School Beverage Guidelines, established in 2006 by the American Beverage Association (ABA), major soft-drink corporations, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.¹⁰⁸ Although the guidelines significantly changed the specific drinks sold in schools, they still allow bottling companies to maintain exclusive contracts with schools and districts. Not only do such contracts provide for exclusive sales of a company's products in vending machines and at school events, they also allow for constant advertising through display of company logos on vending machines, cups, and so on.¹⁰⁹ The ABA uses its industry's engagement in self-regulation to beat back any perceived threat to its ability to conduct business as usual. It strongly opposes, for example, proposed "soda taxes."¹¹⁰

Children and Television

In the United States, television advertising specifically targeting children is limited by the **separation policy defined in the Children’s Television Act of 1990, which requires** commercial matter in children’s programming to be limited to 10.5 minutes per hour during the week and 12 minutes per hour during the weekend.¹¹¹ “Program-length commercials” are also restricted; the inclusion of commercial matter, such as embedded advertising, in a children’s program converts the program into a program-length commercial.¹¹² According to regulations set by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), television programs associated with a product are not allowed to contain commercials for that product, and program characters or hosts are not allowed to sell products in commercials during or adjacent to the shows in which they appear.

Other guidelines come from The Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU), an industry self-regulatory organization created in 1974 to establish best practices and review advertising to children ages 12 and under.¹¹³ Like the FCC regulations they follow, CARU’s guidelines maintain that advertising content should be clearly identified to children.¹¹⁴ However, children watch many programs targeting mixed-age audiences, for which the guidelines are not in effect.

Until very recently, the United Kingdom maintained a strict separation of content and advertising. In a ministerial statement in February 2010, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Ben Bradshaw explained that with the vast majority of European Union member states allowing television placements, “Not to do so would jeopardise the competitiveness of U.K. programme makers as against the rest of the EU, and this is something which we cannot afford to do.”¹¹⁵ Secretary Bradshaw’s statement laid out the guidelines for new policy. The **Office of Communications, the U.K.’s independent telecommunications regulator and competition authority for the communication industries, will write specific regulations limiting product placement in general and completely prohibiting it in children’s programming.**¹¹⁶ With respect to self-regulation, the British Committee for Advertising Practice, an industry-based body responsible for the self-regulation of advertising within the media, issued a revised code in 2010.¹¹⁷ These self-regulations relate only to traditional advertising; commercial references and product placement in media other than television are not covered.

Compared to the United States’ **guidelines**, the U.K.’s new rules may turn out to be relatively strict. Or they may not. Designing specific regulation details will be tricky; in addition, the U.K.’s recent history of privatization and deregulation in the broadcasting industry makes it unclear how long any of the to-be-legislated safeguards will remain in effect.

Children and the Internet

American law requiring that television content and advertising be separated and CARU guidelines for television and commercials also apply to advertising on the Internet.¹¹⁸ However, the blurring of advertising and content presents a bigger problem on the web than on television. **As Advertising Age’s Brian Steinberg notes, “Never has it been more clear that commercials and content are fast becoming one and the same, wholly indistinguishable from each other.”**¹¹⁹ This is especially the case on the Internet, as brands flow from brand websites to YouTube to Facebook to viral content, offering consumers games, videos, contests, conversation, and more.

It is more difficult to identify branding on websites than it is on television, and potentially even less effective.¹²⁰ Some—but not many—websites specifically targeting children include **“ad breaks” in which a small bit of text acknowledges the presence of ads on the page.**¹²¹ Again, **however, children typically access sites not defined as “child-only.” They can access sites, play in** advergames and otherwise branded space, and click through to wherever links may take them.¹²² And even when websites place age blocks on the collection of personal information, they **typically don’t place any block on playing or surfing unless the site is considered “adult only”** (i.e., because of extreme sexual or violent content).

Most vulnerable are adolescents, because while current U.S. law provides some protections for children up to the age of 12, children substantially increase their use of all types of media when they reach adolescence. A 2010 Kaiser Foundation survey found that 8-to-10-year-olds reported almost 8 hours of media exposure daily, while 11-to-18-year-olds reported almost 12 hours of media.¹²³ A 2009 Kaiser Foundation survey of 2,002 8-to-18-year-olds found that only 30% reported that their parents limited how much time they could spend playing video games, and only 36% reported that parents limited their time on computers.¹²⁴ Only 26% reported being **subject to “at least some” regularly enforced rules guiding their media use, and 39% reported** that although they were subject to some rules, those rules were not regularly enforced.¹²⁵

A 2010 study conducted for the National Cyber Security Alliance reported that less than 1% of **parents “prioritize cell phones or gaming consoles as the devices that they most often check to see how their kids are using the Internet.”**¹²⁶ However, of the children surveyed by the Kaiser Foundation in 2010, 66% had cell phones and used them to visit websites, to text, and to send instant messages to friends. They reported spending more time listening to music, playing games, and watching TV on their cell phones (a total of 49 minutes daily) than talking on them (33 minutes).¹²⁷ This increased use comes at the same time adolescents are increasingly targeted by embedded advertising via their many devices and are increasingly psychologically vulnerable to such advertising.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Commercialism—both in and out of schools—is worrisome. Its overwhelming presence creates an environment that negatively distorts the development of children and teenagers. The **pressure on schools to become involved in “partnerships” with corporations continues to intensify.** Insofar as these partnerships involve marketing, they are likely profitable for the corporate partner and unequivocally harmful to students.

The continuing growth and success of embedded advertising is on the verge of completing the **creation of a “total environment” of advertising. Children live in this environment and, as a matter of course, seek out and spend time with branded gaming sites, videos, toys, and so forth.** Ironically, to the extent that people—children or adults—notice the ubiquity of advertising in their lives, they mostly deny its impact on them. They assume that they control what affects them, what they buy, and how they think and feel about the role of products in their lives. The data, however, suggest otherwise.

There are efforts to demonstrate the impact of the social environment on what consumers often consider their freely chosen behavior. In the United States, for example, such demonstrations often center on the visible problem of obesity. In a 2010 New York Times article, Natasha Singer outlined efforts to change such environmental causes of obesity as the greater availability of inexpensive fast foods than fresh vegetables and the pervasiveness of unhealthy, high-stress workplaces.¹²⁹ **Researchers at Yale University’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, among others, continue to conduct quality research and to advocate for policies such as “soda taxes.”**¹³⁰ The Commercialism in Education Research Unit published a legislative brief in January, 2010, offering specific legislative language that can be adapted by municipalities and states interested in limiting various types of school commercialism.¹³¹

Across the Atlantic, this year saw English political candidates speaking out against commercialism and Irish activists derailing an incentive program that once enjoyed the support of cabinet members and government ministers. This last, which led to a corporate retreat from a costly and high-profile newspaper promotion, illustrates that however embedded advertising may appear to be in schools, educators and parents can swiftly confront—and eradicate—it. This example gives hope to those who seek a learning environment free from corporate influence, and it challenges educators to justify other marketing promotions they allow in their schools.

Finally, our analysis of school commercialism in the context of embedded advertising suggests that even seemingly innocuous marketing programs **harm children. When children don’t** recognize advertising because it is buried in a lesson or contest, or because it activates an automatic snacking script outside of conscious control, they cannot cognitively defend against it. And when they recognize but discount advertising because their school supports it or because they assume they are immune to it, they do not defend against it. They are influenced to eat more, to want more, and to think that their self-worth rightly depends upon products they can buy. Concern about the fairness of embedded advertising in entertainment has led to discussions about how to regulate similar strategies in television advertising.¹³² Attention to and concern about embedded advertising should also inform conversations about the policies that enable school-based marketing programs and about the potential of those marketing programs to harm children.

Appendix

The following websites associated with advertising and marketing, health care and nutrition, government policy, education, and academic research were regularly reviewed for material relevant to this report.

Table 1.

Source	Website
Advertising Age	http://www.adage.com
American Advertising Federation	http://www.aaf.org/
American Association of Advertising Agencies	http://www2.aaaa.org/Portal/Pages/default.aspx
American Beverage Association	http://www.ameribev.org/
Association of National Advertisers:	http://www.ana.net/
Center for Science in the Public Interest	http://www.cspinet.org/
Junk Food Generation (Consumers International)	http://www.junkfoodgeneration.org
Consortium for Media Literacy	http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org
Federal Communications Commission	http://www.fcc.gov/

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Source	Website
Federal Trade Commission	http://www.ftc.gov
Institute of Medicine	http://www.iom.edu/Reports.aspx
Interactive Food and Beverage Marketing - Montgomery & Chester	http://www.digitalads.org/
Kidscreen	http://www.kidscreen.com
Big Blue Dot	http://bigblue.com/
British Psychological Society Research Digest Blog	http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/rd/rd_home.cfm
Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood	http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	http://www.policyalternatives.ca/
Commercial Alert	http://www.commercialalert.org/
Empowered by Play	http://www.empoweredbyplay.org/

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Source	Website
Journal of Consumer Research	http://www.journals.uchicago.edu.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/loi/JCR/?cookieSet=1
Medpage Today	http://www.medpagetoday.com
Nielson	http://www.nielsen.com/
Pediatrics	http://ejournals.ebsco.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/Journal2.asp?JournalID=102792
PEN Weekly Newsletter	http://www.publiceducation.org/newsblast_current.asp
Youth Markets Alert	http://www.epmcom.com/

Notes and References

¹ **Advertising** refers to specific communications practices aimed at persuading audiences to purchase products or to adopt particular points of view or belief systems. **Marketing** is broader, encompassing the **array of activities that make up** “the commercial processes involved in promoting and selling and distributing a product or service.”

The definition of commercialism is somewhat more elusive. **Commercialism** is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the principles and practice of commerce; excessive adherence to financial return as a measure of worth.” James Twitchell describes commercialism as consisting of two processes, “**commodification**, or stripping an object of all other values except its value for sale to someone else, and **marketing**, the insertion of the object into a network of exchanges only some of which involve money.” The Center for the Study of Commercialism characterized it as “ubiquitous product marketing that leads to a preoccupation with individual consumption to the detriment of oneself and society.”

See:

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Twitchell, James B. (1999). *Lead us into temptation*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 30.

Jacobson, Michael F. & Mazur, Laurie A. (1995). *Marketing madness*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, p. 12.

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³ Oxenford, David D., Braverman, Burt, & Tomlinson, James W. (2008, July). FCC initiates embedded advertising and sponsorship identification rulemaking proceeding. *Davis Wright Tremaine LLP*. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from <http://www.dwt.com/LearningCenter/Advisories?find=21206>.

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⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2010) *Consultation on Product Placement On Television Summary of Responses*. London: DCMS.

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⁷ See, for example:

<http://www.facebook.com/cocacola>

<http://www.facebook.com/tacobell>

<http://www.facebook.com/McDonalds>

<http://www.facebook.com/axe>

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Davison, W. Philips (1996). The third-person effect revisited. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, **8** (2), 113 – 119. Retrieved September 28, 2010, from <http://ijpor.oxfordjournals.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/content/8/2/113.full.pdf+html>.

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¹⁵ PQ Media (2010, June) *PQ Media Global Branded Entertainment Marketing Forecast 2010-2014*. Stamford, CT: Author, 17.

¹⁶ PQ Media (2010, June) *PQ Media Global Branded Entertainment Marketing Forecast 2010-2014*. Stamford, CT: Author, 9.

¹⁷ Molnar, Alex, Boninger, Faith, Wilkinson, Gary & Fogarty, Joseph (2008). *Click: The twelfth annual report on schoolhouse commercialism trends: 2008-2009*. Tempe, AZ: Commercialism in Education Research Unit, Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University. Retrieved August 25, 2009, from <http://www.epicpolicy.org/publication/schoolhouse-commercialism-2009>.

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¹⁸ To be consistent with marketers' use of the term "Digital Marketing" to describe their use of electronic technologies, we began last year to use this term to refer to the category we had previously called "Electronic Marketing."

Eight categories were originally defined, but beginning with the 2007-2008 report, discussions of the eighth category, Privatization, have been omitted. Privatization refers to the management of schools or school programs by private, for-profit corporations or other non-public entities. It is no longer included in these reports because while Privatization is clearly commercial, it differs substantially from the other categories in that it does not entail marketing or advertising.

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²⁰ For examples, see

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²³ **For background on AIB's Build a Bank Challenge, see:**

Molnar, Alex, Boninger, Faith, Wilkinson, Gary & Fogarty, Joseph (2009). *Click: The twelfth annual report on schoolhouse commercialism trends: 2008-2009*. Tempe, AZ: Commercialism in Education Research Unit, Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University. Retrieved August 25, 2009, from <http://www.epicpolicy.org/publication/schoolhouse-commercialism-2009>.

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²⁷ BP (2010). About BP Educational Service. Author. Retrieved September 1, 2010, from <http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=8041&contentId=7035835>.

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⁴² Cultural observers long have noted that propaganda is most effective when it goes unnoted:

“This is the secret of propaganda: those who are to be persuaded by it should be completely immersed in the ideas of the propaganda, without ever noticing that they are being immersed in it.” Attributed to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels, cited in, among many other places,

Pratkanis, Anthony and Elliot Aronson (2001). *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (p. 87). New York: Holt Paperbacks.

“Individuals are controlled through the power of the norm and this power is effective because it is relatively invisible. In modern society, the behaviour of individuals is regulated not through overt

repression, but through a set of standards and values associated with normality which are set into play by a **network of ostensibly beneficent and scientific forms of knowledge.**”

McNay, Lois (1994). *Foucault: A critical introduction* (pp. 94-95). Cambridge: Polity.

“To not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture. No human being lives outside of culture.” Sut Jhally, cited in

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⁴³ In addition to findings from research on persuasion, sources of evidence that advertising does, in fact, work come from the advertising world itself. Advertisers and marketers are torn between wanting to convince potential clients that their work will show results and their awareness that a capricious market can torpedo the effectiveness of even the best-designed, best-executed campaign. Sometimes, when it comes to their work targeting children, marketers may be motivated to downplay the effectiveness of their work in order to avoid censure.

Those that sell marketing products are less likely to downplay the role of their knowledge. Companies such as EPM Communications, for example, purport to help other companies effectively market to children. EPM sells guides such as *Youth Markets Alert*, *How Tweens & Teens Use Social Media*, *Tween Spending and Influence*, and *Teen Media Use*. Guides like these claim to deliver the information that marketers **“need to make the right decisions about what, how and when to market to tweens.”** Youth marketing conferences, such as Kidpower, spread the wisdom of experts on marketing to children.

Further indirect evidence that advertising works is the amount of money spent on advertising to children. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found in 2008 that the amount spent on the advertising and marketing of food alone totaled \$870 million, with \$186 million of that sum dedicated to school-based marketing programs. If we assume that the companies spending so much money are doing so with expectation of return on their investment, it is reasonable to conclude that, in their judgment, advertising works. In fact, an *Advertising Age* study of the top 100 U.S. advertisers found that although 74 of these companies reduced their advertising spending in 2009, 70% of the 26 companies that increased their advertising spending were able to increase their sales.

More powerful evidence comes in the forms of analysis of actual advertising campaigns. Advertising **effectiveness studies provide important “real-world” data** that show that a given advertising campaign **actually affects consumers’ purchase behaviors. Advertising effectiveness data provide hard evidence that** even in an environment full of potentially distracting or attenuating factors, in the final analysis advertising influences behavior.

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), a British organization for advertising agencies, established its Advertising Effectiveness Awards Competition in 1980 both to document the value of **advertising agencies’ work** and to provide a resource for practitioners of strategies and analysis of effective campaigns. Contestants submit a paper that details their advertising campaign and provides convincing **data ascertaining the campaign’s effectiveness. The organization maintains a data bank of over 700 case**

histories of “best practice in advertising development and results,” which demonstrate significant “return on investment” for the companies involved.

The following are some notable and recent examples of campaigns addressed to children:

The Leo Burnett agency won commendation in 1984 for its “advertising relaunch” campaign for Curly Wurly, a “squiggly bar of toffee enrobed in Cadbury’s milk chocolate...positioned in the self-purchase kids confectionary market with a primary target market of children aged 5-11 years old.” TV commercials convinced children that Curly Wurly was more likeable, more fun, longer lasting, and a better value than other similar candies. A weekly measure of purchase behavior found that sales more than doubled among adults and grew 70% among children as a result of the ad campaign.

Another contestant for a 2009 award, the organic snack company Ella’s Kitchen, detailed a strategy by which it partnered with Viacom Brand Solutions to advertise directly to children on Nickelodeon. The idea behind the campaign was to win children over with “fun and upbeat TV executions” so that they could, in turn, lobby their mothers to buy the products. In the three years since the launch of the campaign, as a direct result of the partnership with Viacom, Ella’s Kitchen generated revenue of £13.5 million.

The school-based voucher program run by Morrison’s, the fourth largest supermarket chain in the U.K., won IPA’s 2009 Grand Prix for Best Integration and the prize for Effectiveness Company of the Year. Morrison’s “Let’s Grow” campaign involved a voucher redemption program that provided schools with gardening equipment and seeds and encouraged teachers and children to enjoy growing their own food. This “partnership program with schools” was supplemented by a general multimedia national advertising campaign. In the voucher program’s first year, 85% of primary schools registered, 39 million vouchers were redeemed and Let’s Grow generated payback of £21.57 per every £1 spent.

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