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Shaping America's Future: Advertising's lasting effects on children's minds and bodies

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Since the invention of mass media and the move from radio to television to the internet, advertising has taken on a huge presence and makes information available to specific segments in relevant ways. The casualties of these innovations, however, are those who are not able to properly accept, critically process, and understand advertisements for all of their facts, illusions, and subliminal messaging: Children. While it is now possible to advertise to children within the law, the effects of children processing as many as 40,000 television commercials per year, even under regulation, are still looked upon as negative by various communities (mediawise.org). The health, psychological, and social risks of sending biased, sales-based messages to children are becoming more relevant as different communities are beginning to see mass advertising's influence on children in America.

This paper will look at the state of children today based on their physical and mental health. It will also examine the state of modern advertising to children, legal issues and protection of children, and take a look at the specific ways that some advertisers have gotten to children under the supervision of their schools and online under the supervision of parents. There are many messages being sent to

children and here we will examine their effects and show any harm that they may be causing for future generations.

Children's Shifting Mentalities

The psychological community has noted certain effects of advertising to children—mainly an increase in materialism. Psychologist Allen D. Kanner, PhD, used to deal with young clients who aspired to be astronauts or nurses, but now sees children aspiring, not for meaningful careers, but to make money.

“Advertising is a massive, multi-million dollar project that’s having an enormous impact on child development. The sheer volume of advertising is growing rapidly and invading new areas of childhood, like our schools (Clay).” He said that children are not only materialistic, but, after being bombarded with commercials, feel inferior for not having certain items. This attachment to money and objects has become characteristic of children growing up around mass media. If children see thousands of messages directed at selling before they can think critically about them, how would they see their role in society as anything but a “buyer?”

Another issue around advertising’s psychological effects is advertisers hiring psychologists. This could potentially lead to children unwillingly accepting messages that may be bad for them. On the contrary, however, some psychologists argue that their participation in advertising efforts ensures that advertising to children is done ethically. Whiton S. Paine, PhD, is a principal of a Philadelphia

consulting firm, Kid2Kid, helping Fortune 500 companies market to children. “If you remove ethical psychologists from the decision-making process in an ad’s creation, who’s left? People who have a lot less sensitivity to the unique vulnerabilities of children (Clay).” While Paine takes on the role of advising corporations to advertise fairly to children, this statement assumes that marketing to children is ethical in the first place. However, advertisers will reach children, and psychological resources are publicly available, therefore psychologists involved in this kind of work are not the sole enablers of mentally reaching children.

Psychologists are also using their knowledge and tools to assess and protect children from the risk that advertising brings them. In 2000, the APA Council of Representatives established TFAC, the task force on advertising and children, in response to ethical questions from several interest groups. The goals of their activities are to:

Collect and examine research on the impact of advertising on children and their families; Examine the Impact of advertising on the social and cognitive development of children, with sensitivity to issues of gender, culture and ethnicity; Examine the potential use and misuse of psychological research and the role of psychologists in advertising to children; Examine contemporary social and developmental factors contributing to children’s vulnerability to advertising; Recommend roles for psychologists in assisting parents and schools in teaching media literacy skills to children; Delineate potential roles for psychologists in influencing public policy (Wilcox).

TFAC revealed some important findings through their meetings and studies. Among them were the success of advertising to children, the link to obesity, and children’s

intolerance of not getting a good that has been successfully advertised to them. TFAC's studies showed that parent-child conflicts commonly occurred when a child's purchase request was precipitated by advertising and denied. Also a high percentage of ads targeted to children are for candy, snacks, and junk food, all successfully increasing the consumption of these items (Wilcox). The issue of obesity is a huge concern in American culture, and the findings of TFAC may have drawn out one possible root of this problem.

Changing Bodies

Childhood obesity has risen sharply in the past twenty years as children are exposed to volumes and volumes of advertisements and promotions around salty, sugary junk-food. A study at the University of Liverpool last year found a huge increase in 9 to 11-year-old children's eating habits after watching food advertisements on television. Obese children increased their food-intake by 134 per cent, overweight children increased their food intake by 101 per cent, and children of a normal weight increased their food intake by 84 per cent (Medical News Today). Children were also more prone to choose the more high-fat foods to eat after watching the television commercials. Dr. Jason Halford, Director of the University's Kissileff Human Ingestive Behaviour Laboratory said that this research "confirms food TV advertising has a profound effect on all children's eating habits – doubling their consumption rate (Medical News Today)." The study proves a direct

and immediate effect of children seeing food advertised on television. Not only does this lead to over-consumption of unhealthy foods, but obese children are even more prone to it than normal-weight children.

On the issue of obesity, the pediatric community also is wary of advertising to children and notes its effects. In 2006, the American Academy of Pediatrics unsuccessfully called for Congress to ban all advertisements for “junk food” targeted to children (Elias). This attempt not only would affect advertising through television and internet, but also in schools, where children are still not safe from marketing. Aside from children’s news shows being funded through advertising, schools have corporate sponsorships that are oftentimes not the best thing for the children.

One sponsorship that offered a potentially unhealthy product in schools was a McDonald’s campaign in the 2007/2008 school year that offered Seminole Co. schools free printing for their report cards if McDonald’s could reward good grades with a free food. The complication with this campaign was that an elementary school was essentially giving children the opportunity to purchase junk food without their parents’ approval. One parent-blogger commented, “This promotion really begs the question, is it appropriate to reward good grades with junk food?” A press release from the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood also quoted a



SCHOOL YEAR: 20____ - 20____

NAME:

SCHOOL:

TEACHER:

RED BUG ELEMENTARY

REPORT CARD

Check your grades!

Check your grades in the current marking period and bring your report card **INSIDE A**

**Seminole County
MCDONALD'S® RESTAURANT**

Please present at the front counter to redeem your food prize. The food prize selection will be a Happy Meal® (Hamburger, Cheeseburger, or Chicken McNuggets®) for any student who qualifies in any one of three ways:

1. All A's & B's in Academics (Grades 2-5)
2. Citizenship (no 'Xs'—K-5)
3. Attendance (2 or less absences with no tardies—K-5)

Limit one Happy Meal® per student per marking period. Offer valid for 30 days from marking period. Report Card **MUST** be presented at time of ordering.



Reward yourself with a Happy Meal® from McDonald's!

A - 90-100 C - 70-79

B - 80-89 D - 60-69

F - 0-59

**McDonald's® Restaurants
in Seminole County**
are proud supporters of various academic programs throughout Seminole County, Florida.



This report card incentive is a joint business partnership with McDonald's and The School Board of Seminole County, FL. McDonald's food prizes are not redeemable for cash, are not valid with any other offer, and are not transferable. Redemption is valid only during current marking period. Cash value 1/20 of one cent. Limit one offer per student per marking period. McDonald's offers Happy Meal choices. Items pictured are not all included as one Happy Meal offer. Choose Fries or Apple Dippers, and choose Milk, Apple Juice or a Soft Drink. Offer valid at participating McDonald's Restaurants in Seminole County, Florida.

Revised 9/07

parent who felt like the bad guy, denying her daughter of her perceived rightful fast-food prize when their family did not eat at fast food chains.

Alex Molnar, an educational policy researcher at Arizona State University, criticized schools enabling of corporate sponsorships promoting unhealthy products. He directed a survey in 2005 which found that 83% of public schools reported campus advertising by corporations, and two-thirds had ad relationships with companies selling food of little or no nutritional value (Elias). The presence of advertising directed towards children has not only reached children by segmenting then through television and the internet, but is also prevalent and sanctioned in their designated learning environment.

Legal Protection

Congress has introduced bills regulating the advertising available to children and the way in which it is carried out to better protect kids that are unable to escape the media and marketing efforts. The FCC is required to consider the educational content of programming to children 16 and under and also regulate commercial time to 12 minutes an hour on weekdays (AEF). Also advertising for a product based on a show cannot take place during the show, but can immediately

follow (AEF). Organizations also act as watchdogs to further protect children from harmful advertising that takes place, sometimes even within the law.

One important child-protection organization, the Children's Advertising Review Unit, has created and maintained an industry standard in fair advertising to children. "CARU" was founded in 1974 and, since then, has not only fought for fairness to child consumers, but also offers information to assist companies in engaging in proper advertising to children, within their guidelines (AEF). CARU defines their mission on their website as follows:

CARU's basic activities are the review and evaluation of child-directed advertising in all media, and online privacy practices as they affect children. When these are found to be misleading, inaccurate, or inconsistent with CARU's *Self-Regulatory Guidelines for Children's Advertising*, CARU seeks change through voluntary cooperation of advertisers.

There are many issues, laws, and organizations in America focused on the ethics of advertising to children, but the issue is also of vital importance all over the world. In Europe, all countries sans France, the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland consider advertising aimed at children as harmful (PPU).

While there is argument that advertising to children helps prepare them to make a cognitive decision about advertisements when they are older, some European countries take the opposite route. In Sweden, not only is advertising to

children under 12 illegal, but displaying sweets within reach to children is also prohibited (PPU).

However, a question of freedom and democratic process is also in question. While most of Europe has a generally negative attitude towards advertising to children, Spain prohibits any ban on advertising because of the “undemocratic” nature of the ban (PPU). This runs the risk of making children’s freedom to develop without being unfairly swayed mutually exclusive with freedom of speech and enterprise.

Pepsico Buckles Down

Some companies have made direct efforts to showcase their respect for children’s developing minds and bodies, and for current legislation. PepsiCo, in their product mix, sells potentially unhealthy “junk food” items, but manages to outline its efforts to reach children and the parameters they plan to follow. The following is taken from the PepsiCo pledge they have developed since participating in initiatives to improve advertising to children.

In the recent past, PepsiCo has updated their standards of when and how to advertise to children. They are one of the first companies to participate in the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), and have also signed voluntary agreements regarding beverages in schools and snacks in schools. They

also follow CARU guidelines and take special care to offer only products that they have deemed Smart Spot Eligible. This Smart Spot program includes foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and other unhealthy ingredients, and foods that are higher in fiber. The standard for this eligibility is based on FDA and National Academies of Science's guidelines. Products that bear this stamp will be healthier choices that PepsiCo feels would be better to market to Children.



PepsiCo also has a formal pledge, which outlines their commitment to children and health. This may make PepsiCo a leader in snack marketing's mindfulness of children's health. Their pledge, which went into effect 1 January 2008, states:

"PepsiCo understands the importance of being a responsible marketer to children and we commit to standards that exceed to CFBAI policies and programs. PepsiCo advertising (including TV, radio, print and internet advertising) directed primarily to children under 12 will only promote products that are Smart Spot qualified. This is a dedicated commitment that as of the effective date 100% of PepsiCo advertising directed primarily to children under 12 will feature Smart Spot products—products that contribute to healthier lifestyles. Our Smart Spot nutrition standards meet established nutrition criteria based on authoritative statements from the Food and Drug Administration and the National Academy of Sciences or provide other functional benefits. These standards meet or exceed the CFBAI's nutrition standards."

Pledges like this and initiatives taken by individual companies set competitive standards for others to do the same. A corporation as large as PepsiCo's recognition of potential risks to children in advertising is important to establishing new standards for the United States marketers.

The State of Advertising to Children

Now that communications have evolved to become both more widespread and are capable of reaching segments, children are a group among many groups to which organizations, companies, and other groups have things to say. However it is clinically proven that children are at a disadvantage with their thinking ability and are disarmed to messages that can be in their worst interest. The two media that enabled mass targeted marketing to children are television and the internet. Since then, want and incentive to advertise to children has increased. In 2000, Children 12 and under directly and indirectly affected \$600 billion of household spending (MediaWise.org). The more money is made from children, the more allure of advertising to them; making kids into prey.

The communication revolution that came along with the invention of television was huge: Mass audiences could be reached with audiovisuals and, with cable, on specific channels targeted to different segments. The concern lies in what

products are primarily marketed to children through this mass targeting. Brian Wilcox, PhD, TFAC chair, evaluated the effects of television commercials on children:

“Because younger children do not understand persuasive intent in advertising, they are easy targets of commercial persuasion. This is a critical concern because the most common products marketed to children are sugared cereals, candies, sweets, sodas and snack foods—such advertising of unhealthy food products to young children contributes to poor nutritional habits that may last a lifetime and be a variable in the current epidemic of obesity among kids” (Willenz).

The unhealthy products that are advertised on television primarily make up the 40,000 commercials that a child sees every year. Television, with its ability to target segments, has allowed mass advertisers to benefit from their presence in kids’ everyday life.

Television is now somewhat regulated by parents and parents continue to take an active role in their concern for their child’s health. 94.7% of children 6-11 years old have at least one television rule as of 2007 (Characteristics of Children and Parents). Television advertisements are being monitored for their content and moving towards promoting less junk to children. However, the obesity rate has more than tripled since 1980 in our country (Children and obesity). Junk food marketers are having success with children, as obesity has more than tripled to 16% of American children from 1980 to 2002 (America’s Children). Regardless of their

motivations, this environment is starting to have an overall effect on the mental and physical health of these children.

Roth 13

After television became institutionalized, internet expanded the reach and narrowed the targeting of advertisers. The APA has recommended investigations regarding this new media environment and how children comprehend and are influenced by it (Willenz). The interactivity of the internet is a new concern that was not an issue with television. Children can offer information about themselves, or be convinced to. They not only endanger themselves, but make themselves more known and susceptible to advertisers.

Kaiser Family Foundation Reports Show Large Reach of Advertisers

The Kaiser Family Foundation is a non-partisan source of facts, information, and analysis for policymakers, the media, the health care community, and the public. The Foundations functions mainly to produce policy analysis and research, host news and information, and provide worldwide health campaigns. Their 2007 report found some startling information on the content being absorbed by children of all ages.

The foundation's 2007 report on television food advertising to children in the United States noted high rates of exposure at a very young age. Children ages 2-7 see about 30 hours of food advertising a year, and this increases to about 40 hours

for children ages 8-12. Not only is 50 per cent of the advertising seen by children for food, but 34 per cent are for candy and snacks, ten per cent for fast food.

Roth 14

Advertisers for these products have an enormous presence in a child's development in America. Because zero per cent of these ads are for fruits or vegetables, comparing junk food and healthy food ads is impossible, and lends to the fact that children may be getting a weighted amount of promotions of harmful food habits.

Conversely, some of the information in the Kaiser report shows a significant presence of health promotion, though no healthy products, to children. The report studied the attributed of food advertising to children and found that 15% of advertising portrays an active lifestyle and 13% include at least one specific health claim. Also, children ages 2-12 see a fitness or nutrition PSA once every 2-3 days, which translates into about one hour and 20 minutes of such promotion. Healthy messages are definitely reaching children despite the amounts of choices of junk food presented. (from Gantz)

Case: Teen Pop Star Targets Children Online on the "DL"

Once case involves a recent issue with website of kids' television and pop star, Hanna Montana. There was an issue with the personally identifiable information (PII) that was asked from children. When CARU looked at the website,

they reported, they noted that a child's age, gender, e-mail, username, first name, and last name were asked before instructing the child to "grab a parent" for credit

Roth 15

card information (Bean). This, request for information is invasive in that it allows the website to have information about a child without any request or notification to parents. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) mandates that website operators must notify parents and obtain consent before collecting PII from a child under 13 years of age (Bean). Listservs, chat rooms, mailing lists, and website logins now require parental consent because they obtain or allow for the possibility of disclosure of kids' PII. However, while mandates can force websites to notify children to obtain request, this does not ensure the presence of a parent. Some children have unrestricted web use, and could offer their information freely by merely choosing not to obey the request to notify mom or dad. Although efforts are directed at protecting children, by their own free will, children make themselves even more susceptible to advertising.

Case: Why is Smoking Just "SO COOL"

Before modern initiatives and legislation on advertising to children, much more harmful products than food were reaching kids in the United States. In the

80s and 90s, R.J. Reynolds put on the Joe Camel campaign, which is now infamous for so directly conveying the fun in smoking to children.

Roth 16

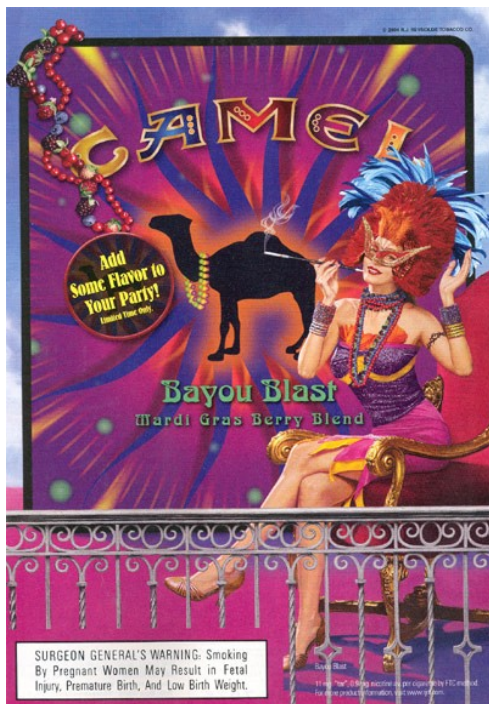
The campaign featured a cool dude of a camel in different situations who was youthfully dressed and engaged in youthful sporting and leisure activities. Joe Cool was found to be harmful when the Journal of the American Medical Association uncovered, through studies, some unnerving things: As of 1991, Joe Cool was as recognizable to a 6-year-old as Mickey Mouse, and Camel's market share of underage smokers went up from .5 per cent to 32.8 per cent (sourcewatch). There was a huge backlash to this campaign from private suits, to claims by the U.S. Federal Trade Commissions. R.J. Reynolds was forced to discontinue the campaign and spend \$9 million on antismoking campaigns to settle (sourcewatch). The success of such a campaign on America's youth is something for parents to keep in mind, but the backlash against such blatant harmful youth-marketing was a powerful enough force to raise awareness and create change.

Now, however, Camel cigarettes use similar tactics with a less specific name to blame. Some current, specialty cigarettes use fun, youthful ideas and promote flavors in special metal tins such as "Twista Lime" and "Winter MochaMint." While there is no kid-friendly camel to blame, the campaign is still attractive to a demographic that may overlap with age groups that should not, legally, be smoking.

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids stated, “Congress also needs to pass legislation granting the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authority over tobacco

Roth 17

products, including the authority to ban flavored cigarettes and crack down on other forms of tobacco marketing and sales to kids.



While the tobacco industry is different from other products in its illegality to children, its reach and effect on them is a measure of the power that advertisements can have over the lives and minds of children.

Concluding Remarks

Communications have exponentially increased connections to people in the world; their effects can be useful to some and harmful to others. As television's huge amount of repeated messaging and internet's interactivity both continue to

Roth 18

target children, kids lives become increasingly influenced and bombarded. Not only are some children prevented by making their own choices and forming their own views and values without a directed influence, but also this influence is harmful in physical and psychological ways as proven in both fields. At home, children's relationship with their parents becomes more focused on what is purchased for them because of the imposed values attached to buying in advertisements.

In conclusion, there is an overall change in the power of, value of, and danger to children since the television and internet media revolutions. Advertisers are clearly reaching children, and a significant amount of this reach is the promotion of products and eating habits that are harmful to a growing body. Success for advertisers of unhealthy products could be mutually exclusive with the good health of the future generations. While children take on a utilitarian purpose in society with buying power, there is much temptation to use tactic of manipulation, sometimes even within the law, to sell to children. The casualty of all this is the increased rate of obesity, increased materialism, and more undiscovered effects that change, mislead, and harm children. When a senior

citizen looks around at children and complains about how kids are fat little brats and have no values, are they being bitter, or are they old enough to see enough change in society to notice what is happening to children because of advertising?

Roth 19

The mayor of Amsterdam commented on children in 1966, years after the invention of television, saying,

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they allow disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children now are tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers” (New York Times, April 3, 1966, p. 16).

There may be more truth in his view than one would think. The question of the future of advertising to children: Will its effects do enough damage to merit a ban on advertising to children in the United States, or will child advertising continue to be a multi-million dollar industry that maintains its increasing place in society? Laws are able to regulate advertising but, as proven by multiple fields, advertising to children has effects that continue even under current legislation.

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