

# Children as consumers essay



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Important to this new paradigm is the socially constructed nature of childhood that can be expanded to take into account the manner consumer culture have been used to construct childhood. What is more, close examination of the cultural worlds of children and young people, as well as commitment with trendy culture, can be a productive way of understanding the experience of childhood.

(Kehily 2012) As consumers, children play a part in economic relations. However, through the practices of consumption they may, as A. H. Dyson (1997) suggests, produce meanings for themselves. She argues that children appropriating cultural products such as music, and computer games as well as from written texts, and can be seen as one of the ways in which individuals make sense of the world and their place within it. Dyson also suggest that superhero stories allow children to experience a sense of control and to feel powerful in an environment where they often have a little power or control. (cited in M. J.

Kehily, 2003) According to James and James (2012) children have been considered to be consumers since the 18th century, when toys and games first started to be sold with children as potential customers in mind. But it was in the 19th century that the idea of children as consumers evolved and led to further marketing practices to attract this particular group. Young people came to be seen in marketing terms as a specific group with disposable income. “Teenagers “are big spenders is reflected in the way that large stores as “Boots” have ranges of products such as cosmetics, CDs and magazines specially targeted to them. “Datamonitor”, on the other hand state that young people expand their spending power further than

these everyday goods to include more expensive purchase such as cosmetic surgery, laptops, mobile phones etc. The significance of children and young people as consumers increases dramatically. One of the reasons could be the influence that children can have on their parents' spending. The skilful wearing down of parental resistance is referred to colloquially as "pester power" (M.

J. Kehily, 2003) Buckingham (2011) point out that children becoming consumers in their own rights. As the market develops new ways to talk to children, and children, in turn, have an impact on parental consumption. (Kehily 2012) In the 21st century, however, the idea of children as consumers started to be questioned. Parents have become more aware of the advertising techniques and the underlying purpose of these techniques – playing on children's dreams and creating desires. As a result, they went on a campaign against such practices, claiming that children should not be exposed to something their young minds could not comprehend (James and James 2012). Nevertheless, Buckingham (2011) suggests that instead of debating about "toxic childhood" and lost innocence, people should try to understand the complexities of the children-consumption relationship. Firstly, because, as Buckingham argues, consumption is part of children's life, hence it is present everywhere and cannot be avoided.

Secondly, the consumer market creates the 'multiple identities of the child consumer'; taking into account the identities children themselves create in everyday lives. Finally, consumption practices can be modelled and help children make informed choices in the future (2011: 66, cited in James and James 2012 p21). Central part of the "matrix of forces" that socialize young

children is consumption (shopping, toys, TV, music, clothing). It is just as central to children's development as the family, school and community life. (M. J. Kehily, 2003) According to Duff (1999), by age 9 or 10, three quarters of children shop alone or with friends. They have progressed from buying lollies, snacks and drinks to magazines and music.

By 10-12 years they are expected to be more in control of their parents and have their own money to spend. (cited in M. J. Kehily, 2003) Moreover, according to Hobbson (1999 cited in M. J. Kehily, 2003) 12 years is the "cut-off point" of childhood in marketing analysis. When parents 'just don't understand', and the age when kids "want to know what is taboo" but are only just starting to test boundaries (Handel 1999, cited in M. J.

Kehily, 2003) UNICEF report (2007) look at some of the reasons behind these statistics by comparing children's experiences in the UK with those of children in Spain and Sweden. This report revealed how children and families in different societies deal with complicated issues in their everyday life. They found growing understanding of inequality between children as they got older. Children had an ambivalent attitude to those who appear to be able to afford all the latest status goods. While many British parents purchased status goods to hide social insecurities, this behaviour was absent in Spain and Sweden, because in Spain parents do not buy their children branded things they get things they want as a reward. In Sweden however, parents buy expensive brands for their children, not because they are cool but because they are better quality. (Unicef 2011) In low-income families children spend more time in front of screens, while the wealthier had access to a wider range of sports and other pursuits. Also they noticed that the most

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important feature of these activities for many wealthy children was demonstrating advantages over others by “ coming first”.

“The impetus to succeed in Spain was motivated more by pleasing parents and doing well personally (rather than doing better than others); in Sweden, outdoor, sporting and creative activities were rarely associated with social comparison.”(Unicef 2011)Nevertheless, children are aware of the fact that “fashionable brands do not bring happiness” In their research was clear however, that their desire some aspect of” posh life “and used brands symbolically themselves.(Unicef 2011)There are gender differences as pointed out by Russel and Tylor (2002, cited in James and James 2012 p21) Buying ‘ girly’ items has to be understood in terms of a difficult relationship between the role of markets, cultural ideas of gender, and the girls own forms of self- expression about what it is to be a girl. James (2012) claims that it is not easy for researchers to describe how children ‘ engage with the world of consumption’ because of so many subtleties behind it. Therefore, Cook (2010, cited in James and James 2012 p21) proposes to look at it as the ‘ concept of consumer enculturation’ as opposed to the ‘ concept of socialization’ which suggests passiveness on children’s behalf. Cook also mentions the ‘ multiple trajectories of children’s involvement in the world of goods and meanings’ and the ‘ diversity of childhood’. He then argues that children will benefit from what the commercial world has to offer by being shown the diversity, as it is present in everyday life, as well as being given a choice of participating in it or not. (2010, cited James and James 2012 p22)In conclusion, I strongly believe that government will support the families to

fight back materialistic culture which affects, our life, and has a negative impact on children's well-being.