Childhood and the mediatization of marketing, 1955-1965

David Buckingham

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In the twenty first century, there has been growing concern about the phenomenon of marketing to children. Campaigners argue that childhood has become inexorably commercialised: children today are subject to a growing barrage of advertising and marketing, using ever more sophisticated techniques. In recent years, there has been legislation to restrict the advertising of particular types of products to children – most notably so-called 'junk food'. There are also ongoing efforts to regulate more covert and deceptive forms of marketing in online and social media. However, the topic also raises much broader concerns: the apparent 'commercialisation' of childhood is seen by some as a kind of corruption of its fundamental innocence and purity; while others regard it as an instance of consumer capitalism at its most rapacious and unprincipled. In this respect, the anxiety about marketing to children appears to unite conservatives and political radicals in a nostalgic yearning for a 'golden age' in which childhood was apparently untainted by commercial forces.[1]

However, this is not a new issue. There is a long history of marketing to children, which can be traced back well into the nineteenth century; and campaigns to restrict and regulate it, while they are more recent, also date back several decades.[2] In this essay, I focus on a particular period – between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s – when there appeared to be a step change in marketing to children. This was most obviously about the advent and dissemination of the new medium of television; yet this was accompanied by a broader shift in marketing strategies and appeals, and by the growth of market research. Not all of the innovations of this period were unprecedented, and traditional forms of marketing persisted. Yet in many respects, we can see the beginnings of a much more intensive 'mediatization' of marketing to children at this time; and while the technologies may be changing, many of the techniques and approaches that provoke particular concern today have their origins in this period.

After briefly describing the broader context of marketing at this time, both in general and specifically in relation to children, I move on to look at the increasing significance of market research, across a somewhat broader time-scale. I then consider in more detail some of the strategies and appeals used in marketing and advertising to children, using specific examples: I consider the differences between girls and boys as consumer markets; and the advertising of two key areas, food products and toys. I draw on a range of sources, including published accounts written by researchers and marketers at the time; articles and advertisements in the commercial trade press; and archival material (industry reports, campaign plans, internal company memos and correspondence). I also look at specific advertisements, both in the form of print (magazine and display advertising) and television commercials: while in some instances I have been fairly systematic about my sampling here, in others (most notably television) I have inevitably been reliant

on the material that has been preserved. Most of this material relates to the United States, but some of it is taken from UK sources – and while I can make some comparisons here, I don't have enough evidence to be definitive about this.[3]

The making of modern consumers

The baby boom of the post-War period was not simply a demographic phenomenon: it had social and cultural dimensions whose influence is still felt today. Over 75 million children were born in the United States between 1946 and 1964. By the end of this period, as the birth rate started to decline, almost 40% of the population was aged under 19 – by comparison with the current figure of less than a quarter.[4] After the privations of the Great Depression and then the Second World War, these children were being born into an era of growing overall affluence. Unemployment was historically low, and average household incomes grew in real terms from just under $40,000 in 1955 to $60,000 by 1967. (It should be emphasised that these are averages: although there was no significant increase in income inequality, around one quarter of the population still lived in poverty.)

While there is a longer history here, it's during this period that we can most clearly trace the development of a modern, so-called 'consumer society' in the United States.[5] By the end of the 1950s, the average US family had seen a 30% increase in its disposable income over the decade. Credit became commonplace. Technological advances meant that new products – cars, home décor, appliances, electronic gadgets – became available with bewildering rapidity, and many had a limited lifespan. It's estimated that US consumers consumed as much as one third of the world's goods and services at this time, while representing only 7% of the overall global population.

Media, and particularly television, were self-evidently crucial here. The number of households with at least one television set in the US grew from under 10% in 1950 to well over 90% (over 52 million) in 1965. Across the 1950s, the number of daytime hours of programming quadrupled, while weekend hours increased ten-fold. As early as 1955, the average TV set was switched on for five and a half hours a day. And of course, the growth of television was almost completely driven (and funded) by advertising. At the start of the 1950s, spending on TV advertising leapt from $12 million (in 1949) to $128 million (in 1951), and increased almost ten-fold again to $1 billion by 1955. Across the following decade, the largest advertising agencies quadrupled their income; and by 1965, advertising expenditure across all media surpassed $15 billion.

While it was undoubtedly lucrative, the advertising industry was also increasingly competitive. Agencies began to expand and diversify their offer, providing a 'total service' to clients that included research, public relations and merchandising, as well as advertising across a range of media. This period is often described by advertising historians as one of 'creative revolution' – and this account has undoubtedly been reinforced by the successful AMC series *Mad Men* (2007-2015).[6] Famous campaigns, epitomised by Doyle Dane Bernbach's work for Volkswagen, eschewed the traditional hard sell in favour of a more knowing, iconoclastic, quirky approach. At the same time, this period also saw the rise of 'marketing science', as agencies began

to employ researchers with expertise in 'depth psychology', and even psychoanalysis: 'motivation research', often using innovative qualitative methods, became fashionable, although there was continuing debate within the industry about the balance between research, economic and creative imperatives.

In the case of television, which quickly came to account for the bulk of advertising expenditure, there was a gradual shift in approach. The sponsorship model – in which the shows and the advertising were often produced by agencies themselves, and named with single brands (*Kraft Television Theater* or *Goodyear TV Playhouse*, for example) – gave way to spot advertisements featuring a wider range of products. Such advertisements were typically shot on film (videotape was not used until the mid-1960s), and many used more sophisticated editing, special effects and camera techniques than were possible in many of the programmes that surrounded them. Advertising could well take up twelve minutes in every hour: it was not until the very late 1960s that regulators began to consider limiting the quantity of TV advertising, at least to children. (The situation in the UK was rather different: commercial television did not arrive until 1955, and it was not allowed to feature commercially sponsored programmes. Time for spot advertising was also restricted, although this meant that it was more commercially valuable: by 1957, in a significantly smaller market than the US, expenditure on advertising on the single commercial channel was already £25 million per year.)

The rise of the children's market

In some respects, as we'll see, advertising to children may have lagged behind wider developments in the industry. There's little evidence of a 'creative revolution' in the material I have studied, and most advertising to children remained fairly straightforward. While teenagers were effectively discovered or 'invented' as a target market in the 1940s, the younger children's market was believed to be relatively small. For example, while a range of new toys emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s, many toy manufacturers initially believed they could do without advertising. However, across the period I'm considering, children gradually came to be seen as a distinctive and lucrative market – one for which advertisers would require particular techniques in order to know and to reach.

Again, television was crucial here. While marketers could more easily target teenagers through other media (most notably magazines and cinema advertising), the advent of television offered significant new opportunities to reach younger children, who were more likely to be confined to the home, and less likely to be able to read.[7] While advertising in children's comics and magazines certainly continued, advertising to children in mainstream newspapers began to decline as the new medium took hold.[8] As with adult television, we can see a steady shift from sponsorship to spot advertising; although programmes for younger children in particular (such as *Ding Dong School* and *Howdy Doody*) tended to rely on 'host selling', where the presenter would pause the action in order to deliver (often ad-libbed) commercial messages about breakfast cereals, candies and toys.

However, Disney's *Mickey Mouse Club,* first broadcast on ABC in 1955, was a significant landmark in this respect: it was put together with funding from twenty

leading advertisers, paying half a million dollars each. In some respects, Disney might be seen as a special case: right from its inception in cinemas in the 1930s, it has always depended on cross-media 'synergy', whereby media and merchandise are locked together in a more comprehensive marketing effort. However, the programme's phenomenal success (it apparently reached 90% of the available child audience) led to a remarkable acceleration in advertising to children; and it was accompanied by *Disneyland*, an hour-long anthology series targeting the entire family.

The most prominent advertiser on *Mickey Mouse Club* was an emerging toy company, Mattel, whose ads I'll consider in a later section. Mattel's ubiquitous Barbie doll (launched in 1959) was the most successful girl's toy of the era; but the company branding – as well as other strategies such as the development of accessories and 'collectables', and the use of market research – were replicated in the marketing of Mattel's other toy ranges as well. Advertising in this context was essentially unregulated: in addition to 'host selling', commercials were able to make exaggerated claims about the nutritional benefits of breakfast cereals and candy, and display toys in ways that made them appear larger, faster and more realistic, with little fear of censure (such practices were not banned until the 1970s). While children could be exposed to as many as 14 toy commercials per hour, some in the industry were concerned that not as much time was available as they would have liked.[9]

Meanwhile, early market researchers showed that children had an impressive recall of television advertising (not only in children's programmes), and that it helped to cultivate brand loyalty. Most importantly, children were also shown to recognize branded products on shopping trips, and to exercise considerable influence on parents' purchasing decisions.[10] What was initially regarded as a mainly seasonal market (especially in the case of toys) eventually came to be seen as one that needed to be addressed and targeted the whole year round. By the end of the period I'm considering, it was estimated that advertisers were spending more than $50 million per year in their efforts to reach the child and youth market.[11] Such was the rate of expansion that some industry commentators began to complain of an 'oversaturation' of the children's market. They were impressed by research that demonstrated children's memory and attention to commercials, but they also feared that it was losing its impact, and that children were becoming more sceptical and more resistant to 'involuntary exposure'.[12]

Several broad trends can be identified in marketing and advertising to children across the mid-twentieth century, although many of them arguably accelerated during this period.[13] Advertisers increasingly addressed children directly, rather than seeking to reach them through their parents – although even in the case of toy advertising, children's appetite for 'fun' was often balanced against more parental concerns with educational value, affordability and safety. Children increasingly came to be recognized (or indeed constructed) as active, independent, desiring consumers in their own right. As in advertising more broadly, there was an growing emphasis on novelty as a motivation for increased purchasing: products were diversified and spun off into new lines, flavours and varieties; and in the case of toys, there was an emphasis on the ever-increasing range of attributes and accessories for children to collect. The children's market also became increasingly segmented, especially in terms of age and gender: new categories ('teenagers', 'pre-teens' and 'toddlers')

began to be identified, along with new products that would apparently meet their unique needs.

Perhaps the most distinctive development during this period, however, was the increasing 'mediatization' of children's consumption and play. This was by no means new: media 'tie-ins' had appeared in radio in the 1930s, and Disney represents another obvious precedent. Indeed, it's possible to identify examples of licensed toy characters and product placement in the early twentieth century, from Kewpies, Billikens and teddy bears through to Buck Rogers and Shirley Temple dolls.[14] One of the most sustained examples has been the Campbell Kids, who have been used in the marketing of Campbell's soup since they were first created by the illustrator Grace Drayton in 1904: after being dropped in the mid-1920s, they were revived in the early 1950s for their fiftieth birthday (for which half a million dolls were produced), and subsequently appeared in TV commercials. While these characters have mainly operated within the world of advertising itself, they have been used to brand a very wide range of merchandise over the years, from kitchen equipment to clothing, dolls, games and other toys. As with many of the other products I'll be mentioning, they also sustain a sizeable market of nostalgic adult collectors to this day.[15]

Nevertheless, the advent of television generated a step change in the use of media, not only as a means of advertising and branding, but also of influencing and defining children's consumer behaviour, and their activities much more broadly. The distinctions between promotion and 'content' became increasingly difficult to discern, as characters crossed and re-crossed the boundaries between them. Goods arrived in the marketplace accompanied not only by advertisers' claims about their attributes, but also by narratives that suggested how they should be used in children's play. While concern about the consequences of this is a more recent phenomenon, it undoubtedly has a much longer history.

The children's market in context

Despite my emphasis here on the importance of media, it is vital to see this in a broader context. The rapid growth of this consumer market was not simply a consequence of developments in media and technology – nor indeed a result of advertisers brainwashing audiences into believing in 'false needs'. It needs to be understood in the context of other, equally far-reaching social and cultural changes.

In the United States, the post-war period saw growing numbers of people moving out of city centres into low-density suburban locations, where they were encouraged and enabled (for example, via the GI Bill) to buy houses for the first time. Social interaction – and indeed children's play – came to focus more on the home than the street; families were increasingly dependent upon private automobiles; and shopping was largely focused around purpose-built malls, which also became venues for leisure (not least for teenagers). Meanwhile, with the development of high schools, young people were staying on for longer in full-time education; although the favourable employment situation meant that many of them could supplement pocket money with their own independent income. (It's important to emphasise again that these developments were predominantly confined to white,

middle-class families: black inner-city residents were often prevented from migrating to the new suburbs, for example.)

As Ellen Seiter describes, mothers were caught in a complex set of pressures here.[16] In the years immediately after the war, women were encouraged to abandon the workplace and resume their role as home-makers; but the percentage of women in the active workforce grew nonetheless. New technology appeared to provide 'labour-saving' devices, but evidence suggests that women's hours of work in the home actually increased, not least because fewer families were able to employ domestic workers. Meanwhile, younger children were increasingly confined to the home; and the emergence of more 'child-centred' ideas about child-rearing meant that mothers were also urged to spend more time caring for, and engaging with, their children.[17] Children's use of media and other consumer goods represented at least a partial escape from these pressures. Using TV as a 'babysitter' enabled mothers to get a break, and to get on with household chores; buying more toys meant that children had more to occupy themselves independently of adult supervision; and mothers often had no alternative than to take their children shopping with them.

Yet even here, the apparent solution came to be surrounded by guilt: television was increasingly condemned by commentators in other media, and mothers were advised that they should limit its use, or actively intervene in their children's viewing. (Contemporary debates about 'screen time' appear to be re-playing many of these early anxieties.) Even in the apparently pioneering phase of the post-war 'consumer society', some commentators were beginning to regard children's consumption as a problem – although at this point, marketers themselves rarely perceived there to be any ethical issues at stake in advertising and selling to children.

Marketing science and child consumers

As I've noted, one key dimension of the expansion of the advertising industry at this time was the growing significance attached to market research. One estimate suggested that there were as many as a thousand market research companies in operation in the United States by the end of the 1960s.[18] A small contemporary flavour of this activity can be found in a glossy book produced by the forward-looking J. Walter Thomson agency, probably in the early 1950s.[19] Entitled *Agency in Action*, the book is targeted at potential clients, and seeks to reassure them that the agency's hefty charge of 15% will offer a good return on their investment. The book contains photoplays illustrating the various stages of the agency's work, but it places a central emphasis on research. While it acknowledges that 'advertising is not an exact science', and that 'creative genius' is vital, it emphasizes the need for 'facts – first, last, always'. 'Facts, predetermined, are one of advertising's cheapest and best forms of insurance,' it proclaims. 'Properly used, research acts as a stabilizer for creative ideas, sees that they swing neither too far to the right nor too far to the left'. Qualitative research is seen as particularly important in this respect: it enables the agency to develop 'a personal acquaintance with buyers'. 'Getting the feel of the public's pulse' in this way is more than just a matter of obtaining 'tabulated replies'; and it is seen as particularly important with 'class C-D buyers', or 'the great mass market'.

This approach was also seen by some to be particularly important when it came to children – who were to some extent regarded as a difficult and even mysterious new market to reach. The historian Dan Cook has traced the early development of market research on children, which parallels the rise and popularization of academic psychology.[20] As he suggests, this research contributed to the broader construction of children as autonomous, discriminating 'little consumers': consumption was seen as a natural, innate desire, running in line with the stages of children's development. Earlier in the twentieth century, marketers' knowledge about children largely took the form of rules-of-thumb, or a kind of commonsense 'folk psychology'; but by the mid-century, it began to become more 'scientific'. The growing market research industry claimed to provide definitive 'knowledge' about children that would enable their consumer desires to be more clearly identified and targeted.

Like Cook, I use scare quotes here to reflect a certain academic scepticism about the validity and status of this knowledge. As with any research, the 'facts' that are established by such studies are framed by their underlying theories and methods; and, like other commercial practices (advertising, product design, retailing, and so on), they help to define and construct the figure of the child consumer in particular ways. What Cook calls 'commercial epistemologies' are not neutral – not least in that the 'knowledge' they offer is intended to be bought and sold.

However, the dividing line between commercial market research and academic research is not entirely clear-cut. While there were a few academic studies during the period I'm considering,[21] academic research on marketing to children didn't really take off until the early 1970s; and when it did so, it arose at least partly in response to growing calls for regulation (and hence was framed by rather different assumptions). Nevertheless, even at this time, there were academic researchers who were keen to sell their work on the commercial market. Universities span off 'Marketing Science Institutes', like the one established in 1961 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which soon set up their own undergraduate and graduate programs; and the first doctoral dissertation on child marketing, by James McNeal, was published by the 'Bureau of Business Research' at the University of Texas in 1964.[22] As the child market became steadily more lucrative, so too did the business of producing 'knowledge' about it.

Marketing market research

From a slow start, this market research enterprise grew apace in the period I'm considering; and by the mid-1960s, there was a plethora of experts, agencies and ongoing research studies in the field of children's marketing. In the archives I have reviewed, there are numerous reports and press articles describing the findings of research studies that are often very elaborate in scope.[23] The focus at this point was primarily on high-schoolers, not least because they were seen to have the most disposable income; although it increasingly encompassed younger children as well.

Initially, questions about marketing and consumer behaviour were included in more general large-scale surveys. Probably the earliest of these was the triennial youth market survey, first conducted in 1948 by the *Young Catholic Messenger*: among other

things, this explored the preferences, buying habits and influence on family spending of a sample of 1600 12-14 year olds in Catholic schools. Meanwhile, the Purdue Youth Panel conducted an annual survey with a sample of 15,000 high school students, which ran from the late 1940s through to the early 1960s[24]; in 1953 the Rand Corporation's Youth Research Institute began its annual Youth Poll, which still continues in various forms today; and similar surveys were conducted by industry-wide organizations such as the Market Compilation and Research Bureau and the Brand Names Foundation.

This period also saw the establishment of specialist divisions, and eventually entire agencies, devoted to the study of young consumers. Eugene Gilbert established his own agency as early as the mid-1940s, and was a dominant figure in the field until his early death in 1964; and he was later joined (and to some extent replaced) by Melvin Helitzer, whose Madison Avenue agency Helitzer, Waring and Wayne opened its doors in 1962. Both agencies conducted several of the specialist studies mentioned here; and I'll discuss the work of Gilbert and Helitzer in more detail in the following section. Other specialists were to follow, including Leber, Katz and Paccone, the Child Research Service, Teenage Public Relations Inc. and the E.L. Reilly agency. Meanwhile, larger agencies like J. Walter Thompson and McCann Erickson also produced regular reports mapping the dimensions and characteristics of the teenage market, and noting the coming and going of specific 'youth market fads'. While some of these were commissioned by specific clients, such as Ford and Coca-Cola, others appeared to be more generic attempts to sell the agency's services.

In other instances, child-oriented publications and media outlets conducted surveys of their own audiences – not least in order to stimulate the interest of potential advertisers. The earliest of these were probably those undertaken for magazines like *American Girl* and *Boys' Life*, but the most sustained were the regular studies of readers of *Seventeen* magazine, which began in 1958. Its annual 'Teen Trends' surveys (typically using interview samples of 1500-2000 readers) were mostly undertaken by Eugene Gilbert's Youth Research agency, and were later supplemented by more specialized studies: by the early 1970s, these included reports on skin care, 'back to school' products, and what was called 'personal daintiness'.[25] Meanwhile, in the early 1960s, the magazine and book publisher Scholastic began publishing annual reports on the 'socio-economic attitudes' of high school youth, much of which focused on their relationships with key consumer brands. The Research Marketing Services division of ABC Television conducted a large-scale youth survey in 1964, using government data alongside its own commissioned research, claiming to tell 'a very purse-warming story for today's and tomorrow's advertisers'. Other such reports were commissioned by publications aimed at parents, such as *Baby* and *Parents* magazines. A *Parents* magazine study from 1961, 'The Fabulous Young Families with Children Market', presents itself as 'a service to national advertisers' – although it is a service that is clearly designed to persuade them of the commercial value of its own readership.

As well as talking up the size and significance of the children's and youth market, these reports are also keen to emphasise the necessity of research itself. They make strong claims about the scientific legitimacy and authority of their approach, as well as its commercial value; and they include stories about successful campaigns that illustrate the benefits both of broad-scale research and of specific market testing. Yet

many of them contain a curious mix of hard data and generalized commonsense. On the one hand, there is clearly a premium on 'facts': most of these reports contain pages upon pages of descriptive statistics about young people's disposable income, their spending behaviour and their brand preferences. Apparently illustrative quotations from interviews are also presented in quite a 'raw' fashion, with little attempt at interpretation.

However, such material is often accompanied with bland truisms and platitudes about what children and young people are 'really' like. Many of these assertions appear quite contradictory: young consumers, we are told, are both conservative and open to new ideas; they tend to copy each other, yet they also wish to be independent and individual; they want to assume responsibility, but they also crave freedom; they are impressionable, yet they are also frequently sceptical about advertising. Of course, such sweeping assertions might well be true of particular children or young people at different times and in different contexts; but the analysis here tends to remain at the level of superficial generalization. As we'll see, much of the direct advice to marketers – about how to design campaigns, launch new products, or use different media channels – also seems somewhat banal and obvious.

Nevertheless, this research steadily became more ambitious. While there was little discernible use of the more esoteric forms of 'motivational research', many studies supplemented large-scale quantitative surveys with more child-centred qualitative methods such as 'free association discussions' and visual approaches, as well as observations in laboratories and homes.[26] By the mid-1960s, some were making use of 'improvisational settings' and role-play, and extending beyond advertising itself to consider aspects of product design – approaches that are not too far from the contemporary vogue for 'co-creation'.[27] Researchers urged marketers to 'respect' children, to treat them as people, and to avoid patronizing them.

The children's and youth market was also increasingly segmented, at least in terms of age and gender; and the teen market in particular was constantly recalibrated into smaller sub-categories. As we'll see, these arguments were typically based on simplified versions of developmental psychology, particularly a Piagetian 'ages and stages' approach. However, as the 1960s progressed, some of the more fashionable agencies also began to draw on more complex psychological theories, and on sociological research: for example, a compendious McCann Erickson study from the early 1970s, simply entitled *Youth*, provides an extensive socio-historical analysis of youth culture – albeit with frequent reference to the role of its client, Coca-Cola.

All this material was reported, not only in specialist trade papers like *Printers' Ink*, *Sales Management* and *Advertising Age*, but also in the mainstream press – and often in somewhat breathless terms. Commentators marveled at the scale of the demographic boom, and the new-found spending power of young people; although they also expressed bewilderment at the apparently fickle and unpredictable nature of the children's and youth market, and some vague alarm at children's influence on adults. However, it was not until the very late 1960s that advertisers and market researchers began to recognize and address any ethical concerns. While market researchers were keen to emphasise the unpredictability of the youth market – and hence the need for their services – they also presented it as a promising, and partly untapped, commercial opportunity. Only when advertising came under attack did

researchers begin to concede that it might not always be quite as effective as they had claimed.

The words of the gurus

Probably the most frequently cited expert in press reports during this period was Eugene Gilbert, who is often credited as the 'inventor' of youth marketing research – although he also wrote a good deal about younger children as well. I'll look at Gilbert's work in more detail below, and particularly at his book *Advertising and Marketing to Young People* (1957). However, I also want to set his work in a broader historical context, by considering the contributions of three other market researchers, whose books were published over a longer time span. Like the research reports I've mentioned, all these books are essentially designed to sell their services to potential clients; but they also purport to provide a wider body of scientific 'knowledge' about young consumers, and about how marketers need to address them – knowledge that, despite many significant changes, remains remarkably consistent across a period of five decades.

E. Evalyne Grumbine

The earliest of these books dates from as far back as 1938. *Reaching Juvenile Markets: How to Advertise, Sell, and Merchandise through Boys and Girls*, was written by E. Evalyn Grumbine, the advertising director and assistant publisher of *Child Life* magazine. Her book represents a summation of arguments she had been developing for some time in articles in the trade press. Like many of the reports I have mentioned (which date from several decades later), the book emphasizes the growing importance of the children's market, both as a commercial opportunity in itself, and as a potential influence on parents – Grumbine is interested not just in marketing *to* children, but also (as in her title) *through* them to their parents. Despite the Depression, she is able to paint a picture of expansion across the decade: she points to the rise in radio ownership, the growth in the numbers and reach of 'juvenile' magazines, and the wider range of venues for promotional activity (for instance, the increasing trend towards children's sections in department stores). This is all seen to feed the increasing expenditure on advertising: between 1931 and 1936, for example, advertising expenditure in the comics sections of newspapers had risen from $160,000 to $14 million.

The book provides a good deal of homespun 'wisdom' about children, much of it couched in very generalized terms. 'Children,' we are told, 'are real enthusiasts ready to accept any challenge that demands action and gives them something to do. They are natural joiners and like nothing better than to belong to a club and have a secret password and badge or button to wear…'.[28] However, these generalizations about what 'children' apparently want or need, and about how they think, are partly qualified by the use of developmental psychology. In common with a great deal of 'marketing scientists', Grumbine presents a version of Piaget's 'ages and stages' model, cut across by generalisations about gender (where girls are generally seen to be 'ahead' of boys): marketers, she argues, need to segment their products and

promotional appeals in ways that reflect the innate characteristics of boys and girls at different ages.

On this basis, the book goes on to provide a compendium of marketing techniques that are seen to be particularly appropriate: these include contests, premiums and gifts, clubs, coupons and vouchers, and various forms of packaging and store display. It is through such methods, Grumbine argues, that marketers can engage children's innate needs and desires – for collecting, for exercising their imagination and curiosity, for joining and socializing, and for playing at being grown-up. She provides extensive statistical analysis and examples of companies that have successfully used such techniques, along with checklists of key advice. Further chapters then explore children's preferences for different kinds of media – books, illustrations, magazines and radio programmes; ways of organizing clubs and competitions; and strategies for 'selling children through schools' through sponsored teaching materials, films, posters and worksheets.[29]

Some of these techniques appear strikingly 'modern', and are the kinds of practices that attract growing concern today. For example, Grumbine discusses the use of children as salespersons and 'junior representatives' – or what we might now call 'brand ambassadors'. There are also several instances of celebrity endorsements (Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, Jane Withers) and character licensing (not only Disney, but also Popeye, Mother Goose, Peter Rabbit and others). Some of her examples of in-store promotions might be described today as instances of 'event marketing' or even 'experience marketing'. Equally modern in some respects is the overall construction of the child consumer. Grumbine does begin by expressing some concern about the 'exploitation' of children, but her abiding emphasis is on their autonomy: the market is an arena in which children can express themselves, and in which their natural, pre-existing desires can be recognized.[30]

Eugene Gilbert

The second book I'll discuss here, Eugene Gilbert's *Advertising and Marketing to Young People* was published almost twenty years after Grumbine, but it echoes many of her arguments and approaches.[31] Gilbert famously began his career as an after-school assistant in a shoe store in Illinois: when he proposed ways of researching and then targeting the store's younger customers more effectively, there was a significant leap in turnover. He quickly formed a youth survey business, employing 300 of his peers to conduct polls at a rate of $3 per day.[32] An entrepreneurial young man, Gilbert bypassed college and went straight to New York, where he set up his own research and marketing agency: within five years, he was employing 120 'field operatives' in 250 locations, gathering data from 400,000 young people annually. As early as 1950, he had gathered 35 clients ranging from Pepsi-Cola and General Electric to the US army, and his income was reportedly 'in five figures'[33]; by the end of the decade, he was claiming to employ 5000 'poll-takers', and to have completed six million research interviews.[34]

As with Grumbine, Gilbert's book brings together a compendium of advice developed over the previous decade, published both in trade journals and reports, and (in his case) in syndicated columns entitled 'What Young People Think', which

were published in more than 300 national and regional newspapers. Like later marketing researchers, Gilbert sees young consumers in three main ways: as a market in their own right, with their own disposable income; as a means of influencing adults; and as a starting point for building brand loyalty over the longer term.[35] The book opens with a detailed statistical presentation of the expanding size, scope and influence of the young people's market, and some projections into the future. This is a new and highly influential generation of young consumers, Gilbert argues: it is one that requires 'new and forward-looking products', as well as new methods of marketing. Yet twenty years on from Grumbine, there seem to have been very few changes in the basic wisdom of market research.

Thus, like Grumbine, Gilbert segments the child and youth market using developmental psychology (drawn more from Arnold Gesell than Piaget). This permits a series of generalized, normative statements. 'The seven year old,' we are told, 'has not yet learned to be a good loser; he [*sic*] tattles, runs home if things go badly, bristles if he feels he's been cheated, and exposes a good deal of sensitivity'. By contrast, the nine year old is 'a self-motivating youngster'; the eleven year old is 'a creature of boundless energy'; while the twelve year old 'uses his own initiative in a more confident fashion'. Teenagers are apparently more about 'inner forces and drives': thirteen year olds are moody, reflective and over-conscientious; fourteen year olds are co-operative, frank and communicative; fifteen year olds are self-critical, independent and discriminating; and so it goes on. Here again, these generalizations often appear contradictory: children have enquiring minds, but they also jump to conclusions easily; they are very open to suggestion, but they are also likely to resist when they feel they are being duped; they are flexible and even volatile in their preferences, but they are also conservative.

As in Grumbine's book, these assertions are used to support a series of detailed recommendations about the most appropriate marketing strategies and appeals. While he does consider the emerging potential of television, there is little sense at this time that television might be capable of addressing more specialized 'niche' audiences: rather, it is seen as a 'mass' medium, designed for the whole family. This aside, most of the approaches Gilbert outlines are very similar to those in Grumbine: there are chapters on contests, premiums, packaging and point-of-purchase techniques, character licensing and celebrity endorsement, sponsorship, marketing in schools, and so on – all accompanied by lengthy checklists of advice, case studies and lists of sources, media channels and opportunities for targeted promotions. Here again, methods are matched to the supposedly inherent characteristics and desires of particular age groups, as well as the nature of the products themselves.

Despite these apparently timeless generalizations, Gilbert insists that this is a rapidly changing market: assumptions are not enough – what's needed is hard, scientific research, and a 'constant flow of information' about the latest developments. Gilbert goes to some lengths to persuade his readers/clients of the rigour of his research, and the commercial benefits that have accrued to those who have used it, particularly when pre-testing the appeal of new product lines. The book's numerous statistical tables seem to exercise a strong rhetorical function in this respect; although in some cases, the empirical basis of this work is fairly questionable. For example, some of the data seems to derive from small coupon-sized survey forms

that accompanied Gilbert's newspaper columns – a tactic that enabled him to claim extremely large sample sizes.

However, the most notable aspect of Gilbert's methodology was his recruitment of young people, both to conduct research interviews and to promote particular brands. This was partly on the basis that, as Gilbert put it, 'kids can talk to kids'; but it also served as a form of 'word-of-mouth' marketing. He was particularly interested in using 'opinion leaders', who had high 'elective positions' in their schools, and were best placed both to identify and also to lead new trends. Recruits were provided with free merchandise and brochures to distribute; and in the process, the market researcher effectively became a kind of 'brand ambassador' or even a 'cool hunter'. In this approach, the boundary between product development, research and promotion is very blurred.[36] As the author of his obituary in the *New York Times* put it: 'Realising that youthful purchasing habits follow a series of fads, [Gilbert] helped devise ways to generate the fads, rather than just waiting for them to happen.'[37]

While he is keen to emphasise the complex and ever-changing nature of the youth market, and its growing influence on parents, Gilbert also offers some reassurance – particularly to the wider public audience who might read his syndicated newspaper columns – about the continuity of the generational order. Today's teenagers may appear outwardly different from their predecessors; they have greater influence within the family, and parents themselves are younger and less certain about imposing their tastes and values. Nevertheless, he argues, young people are largely adapting to changing circumstances in fairly stable and practical ways.[38] The majority of youth, he frequently asserts, are quite conventional, and even conservative: they are not afraid of hard work; they tend to accept their parents' authority; they endorse cutting taxes, and they aren't in favour of strikes; and they don't have much time for beatniks or delinquents, hard liquor or big-city life. 'Jane Teen', one column assures readers, 'is really an old-fashioned girl'; while his book is unwise enough to describe rock-and-roll as a temporary 'fad' that would eventually 'die down'.[39] Gilbert died at the age of 40 in 1966, and it's hard to imagine what he would have made of the seismic events of the years that followed.

Melvin Helitzer

As I've mentioned, Gilbert's place as the guru of youth research was taken over in the mid-1960s by Melvin Helitzer, who had formed his own specialist agency in 1962. Helitzer's book, *The Youth Market*, co-authored with Carl Heyel, was published in 1970. As in the other books I've discussed, the children's and youth market is described here in somewhat breathless terms, as a growing – and still somewhat underestimated – commercial opportunity. Addressed primarily to marketers, it is presented as a definitive compendium of market research knowledge about child and youth consumers.

Once again, the children's and youth market is broken down into developmental 'ages and stages', drawing on psychologists such as Piaget and Gesell. We have normative statements about the needs and desires of three and four year olds, or fourteen and fifteen year olds – although the authors also suggest that advertisers should not be aiming at a specific target, but at a 'rainbow' of age differences, 'where

the individual hues may be brilliantly discernible, but shimmer and shift and merge one into the other'.[40] Such evocative flourishes aside, Helitzer and Heyel place a strong emphasis here on research 'science' – although here we can begin to see greater mention of more participatory techniques, 'play acting, simulated shopping situations, picture questionnaires and special interviewing and observational techniques' especially suited to children.[41] Yet however child-centred they might appear, the primary logic for such methods is that (as Helitzer and Heyel put it) 'research pays', both by preventing costly failures and by generating lucrative new ideas.

As in the earlier books, this one goes on to offer a range of successful case studies, and checklists of (seemingly somewhat obvious) questions about different marketing strategies. The range of techniques – the use of different media, packaging, in-store promotion, character licensing, marketing in schools, and so on – is familiar; and much of their guidance on 'what works' in children's advertising – the use of music, animation and sound effects, 'realistic' performers, status appeals – echoes similar advice in Gilbert's work. Here too, the children's and youth market is described both as 'malleable' and as difficult to reach. 'It is the young of any given market… that can be most easily shifted in purchase direction', we are told[42]; and yet this is a 'tricky business', which needs to be informed (needless to say) by sound research.

Helitzer and Heyel also insist on the need for a more participatory approach, that will involve children more actively – encouraging them to sing along, to complete a drawing or a jingle, to send in ideas for new products, or to create their own ads. While this is certainly more in line with wider developments in the industry at the time, many of the 'participatory' techniques that are described (such as clubs, collecting, competitions, and providing feedback) can also be found in Grumbine's book, thirty years earlier.

However, Helitzer and Heyel are writing at a moment where the influence of advertising is coming to be regarded as controversial. They point to the risk of provoking parental resentment over unduly 'high pressure' appeals; and to the bad publicity surrounding the advertising of war toys and cigarettes, as well as growing concerns around television violence. They caution advertisers to eschew the 'pied piper image', to avoid deceptive appeals, and to ensure that products are safe and of good quality. They also advise them to avoid playing on children's influence, 'asking mommy to buy'.

There is also a stronger sense here of young consumers' potential resistance to advertising: to a greater extent than Gilbert, for example, the authors insist that even pre-teens are knowledgeable, and sometimes critical, about advertising appeals. Young people, they claim, are growing up more quickly, not just physiologically but also in terms of their media sophistication. In the wake of the so-called 'youthquake' of the late 1960s, they describe older teenagers as more independent, more critical, and more socially aware than those in the reassuring picture painted by Gilbert. Accordingly, 'hard sell' advertising is to be eschewed in favour of less direct appeals, 'creative communications' and approaches that seek to deflect or incorporate such scepticism.

Cy Schneider

The last book I'll consider here appeared several years later, in 1987, although it draws a good deal on experiences that took place during the period I am considering. Like the others, Cy Schneider's *Children's Television: The Art, the Business, and How it Works* is primarily addressed to his fellow marketers; and despite its title, it is principally concerned with advertising. At the time of writing, Schneider had recently retired from his position as the first head of Nickelodeon, a new specialist cable channel aimed at children. Yet most of his career had been as an advertising executive. While working at the Carson Roberts agency and its successors from the mid-1950s through to 1980, he had directed the account for Mattel toys. Schneider wrote and directed Mattel's commercials, first screened during Disney's TV shows, including those for the Barbie doll; and he took Mattel from being a tiny start-up to the world's leading toy company, with annual sales increasing from $4 million in the mid-1950s to more than $300 million by the mid-1980s. Interestingly, Schneider identifies the 1950s and 1960s as the key period in the development of the children's market: 'virtually all the innovations – the development of new advertising and marketing techniques, and the important research on children as an audience – took place during these years,' he claims. 'What appears to be a new development today is merely a rehash and dressing up of an idea originally formulated years ago.'

In line with this, Schneider's own book offers relatively little in the way of new 'knowledge'. As in the others I've discussed, there is an appeal to the authority of developmental psychology, but much of the advice here is fairly banal. Marketers are urged to keep things simple, to emphasise fun, to appeal to kids' desire to feel grown up, to be honest, and so on. Advertising shouldn't lecture or patronise children; although equally it shouldn't try too hard to appear cool or fashionable. Despite the emphasis on marketing science, the advice here rarely goes beyond the obvious.

The title of Schneider's book suggests that it will be about children's television; yet it contains very little discussion of the actual programmes themselves. The 'art' of his subtitle is barely considered: the book is predominantly about the 'business'. Yet to a much greater extent than Helitzer and Heyel, Schneider is bound to address public criticisms of the commercialization of children's television, which had significantly increased during the intervening years. His response to such concerns is quite aggressive: critics like Peggy Charren of Action for Children's Television are dismissed in a chapter entitled 'The Do-Gooders, Politicos, Pedagogues, and Assorted Other Ax-Grinders'. Schneider sweeps aside criticisms of practices such as character licensing and product-based cartoons, which were attracting widespread concern at the time (although he does express concern that they might have reached saturation point). Calls for increasing government regulation are also roundly dismissed: dealing with any negative aspects of children's relationship with television, he suggests, should be a responsibility for parents.

In rejecting what he sees as exaggerated claims about the harmful influence of television on children, Schneider is also bound to emphasise their discriminating and sceptical attitude towards advertising as well. Children, he asserts, are not gullible or easily manipulated, but sophisticated, active viewers. He refutes the idea that advertising to children is like 'shooting fish in a barrel': this is a 'fickle, faddish, constantly changing audience' that is not easy to reach or persuade. He points out

that many campaigns directed towards children have failed, resulting in 'staggering' financial losses. Yet, ultimately, this is an unashamed defence – indeed, a celebration – of television as a commercial medium, a means of selling audiences to advertisers. 'Better' television for children will arise, Schneider argues, not from the efforts of self-righteous campaigners, but from the operations of the market itself.

The historical narrative I've outlined here could be extended to more recent books on children's marketing, such as Gene del Vecchio's *Creating Ever-Cool* (published in 1997) and Martin Lindstrom's *Brandchild* (2003). What remains striking is that, despite many far-reaching technological, economic and social changes, the fundamental approach of these books – and indeed much of the 'knowledge' and advice they purvey – remains remarkably consistent. Indeed, some of the methods – both of research and of marketing itself – that are currently considered fairly *avant-garde* are in evidence in these much earlier periods. While they may use different technologies, and a different vocabulary, the use of 'participatory' research, 'peer-to-peer' marketing, and even 'co-creation' – not only for youth, but also for children – can be identified as long ago as the 1930s. Likewise, many of the practices that later came to be viewed with suspicion – product placement, character licensing, mobilizing 'pester power' – are described by authors like Gilbert and Grumbine with very few ethical qualms. Perhaps the most significant difference today is that marketers are able to use digital means to gather data about consumers, and to do so much more effectively; although even in the 1920s and 1930s, they still had much more primitive and haphazard ways of doing the same thing (for example through competitions and mail-ins).[43]

In the later books, there is a need to refute such criticisms more directly. The celebration of children as discriminating, sceptical consumers thus inevitably comes to the fore, although it is certainly apparent in the earliest publications I have discussed. As such, marketers increasingly have to acknowledge that success is not guaranteed – although in a sense, this merely supports their claims about the need for research, and for their own expertise. The 'mediatization' of children's culture across this period was undoubtedly a significant shift; yet in many respects, the key change was less to do with new ideas about children or even new approaches to marketing than with the expanding scale and the apparent 'professionalisation' of market research itself.

Modernising appeals?

The 'mediatization' of the children's market was not a dramatic, overnight revolution, but a gradual and uneven development. Television undoubtedly made a significant impact, but at this time it was largely perceived as 'mass' medium. In the early 1950s, programmes for children were a key part of the incentive for parents to invest in buying a set in the first place[44]; but by the end of the decade, with access to television rapidly reaching saturation, attention shifted more exclusively to the 'family' audience. Children's programmes were initially screened in the afternoons, after school hours, but children came to be regarded as a less lucrative audience for advertising than 'housewives'; and as a result, children's shows were increasingly confined to Saturday mornings – the so-called 'kid vid ghetto' – when adults were

assumed to be less available to view. Marketers continued to use print media – comics, magazines, leaflets, posters and so on – in their attempts to target children specifically. Nevertheless, print media themselves became increasingly influenced by – and connected with – television and other media: marketing became increasingly 'integrated', cutting across and combining different media.

Even so, there were some notable differences in this respect, not least between boys and girls. Some insights here can be found by comparing two relatively conservative children's magazines from the 1950s, *Boys' Life* and *American Girl*. Both were first published in the 1910s (1911 and 1917 respectively) and both were the official publications of the US scouting movement (*Boys' Life* continues, although *American Girl* ceased publication in 1979). Both were targeted at children and pre-teens (or 'sub-teens' as they were sometimes called), rather than the youth market addressed by magazines like *Seventeen*: the circulation of each was around half a million at this time.[45] While one might expect a central focus on the outdoor life, these titles provide some insights into the overall range and content of advertising to children during this period.[46]

In the years I reviewed, between 1954 and 1961, there was little change in the advertising in *Boys' Life*. Many of the ads focus on hobbies, both outdoor and indoor: in 1954, this includes fishing, camping, shooting and sports, as well as photography, technology (building radios) and science and construction toys. Most of the clothing ads are for utility clothing (such as 'anti-freeze' jackets); only one (for Lee jeans) features an admiring girl in the background. An ad for Cuticura pimple cream reassures readers that this is 'not a sissy cover-up'; while another claims that 'He Men' would choose Hickok belts and accessories. As the decade progresses, females make only rare appearances: they are sometimes present in ads for Coke and 7-Up, and the prospect of dating is mentioned in an ad for electricity. 1961 sees ads for Clearasil, Vaseline hair tonic and Max Factor 'face conditioner', but again most of the advertising is related to sports and hobbies. Neither in the advertising nor in the content of the magazine itself is there any sense that boys might be socializing with the opposite sex, or even interested in them.

The contrast with *American Girl*, the equivalent girls' magazine, is very striking in this respect. As in *Boys' Life*, there are some ads for scouting-related clothes, and for hobby equipment – in this case, including cooking and dress-making as well as sports. Both also carry ads for soft drinks and candy, as well as for ways of making money through part-time work (such as door-to-door selling). However, the advertising in the girls' magazine is much more focused on matters of appearance: ads for deodorants, clothing and underwear, cosmetics and beauty products become more prominent as the decade proceeds. The fashions featured in the ads and the magazines themselves are by no means exclusively geared to the outdoor scouting life: there are ads for teen bras featuring admiring boys, and even one for 'Young Enchantress' nylon stockings. By 1961, there is a regular column of 'teen shop talk', featuring new clothing and accessories; and while many of the fashions are conservative and wholesome, the illustrations and captions emphasise values such as poise, charm and glamour.

Where girls are conspicuous by their absence in *Boys' Life*, the reverse is not the case here: a growing number of ads feature boys, not only in relation to clothing but

other products as well. While there is a central emphasis on hobbies and outdoor activities, *American Girl* also much more frequently features girls and boys together in social or dating scenarios. Advertising is also often tied in with advice, mostly to do with romance and relationships; by 1957, *American Girl* is carrying a 'problem page', and ads occasionally purport to offer such advice themselves. However, where boys' biggest problems seem to involve 'how to get the most out of your bike' or how to 'toughen up' with a work-out, girls are seen to need advice on how to behave on dates. In 1961, girls are asked 'do you feel timid around boys?' and informed about 'what boys want to hear' and 'what boys look for in a girl', although there is nothing remotely equivalent in *Boys' Life*.

The advertising and content in *American Girl* also becomes steadily more media-focused as the decade progresses. Issues in 1954 feature a movie column, and a cover picture of girls and boys listening to records; but by 1961, there are regular record and movie reviews, film-star pin-ups, and instructions on new dance crazes. Again, such material is much more marginal in the pages of *Boys' Life*: there is very little evidence here of the forms of youth culture that are often seen as characteristic of the period. In all these respects, *American Girl* comes much closer to teen girls' magazines of the same period, such as *Seventeen*. Of course, it's hardly a surprise to find that this is such a stereotypically gendered world (or indeed such an exclusively white one). Yet in all this, boys and girls also appear to have a rather different relationship with consumption itself. It's tempting to say that, as compared with boys, pre-teen girls are increasingly constructed as consumers as the decade progresses. This consumption behaviour is steadily tied to sexuality and romance: for girls, consumption seems to involve much more intensive work on the self than it does for boys.

However, there is also a form of masculine consumption on display in *Boys' Life*: it may be more obviously oriented towards activity, and much less focused on perfecting one's appearance or on personal relationships, but it is nevertheless quite extensive in scope. Even the most natural outdoor activities seem to require comprehensive sets of accessories. Nevertheless, the advertising in *Boys' Life* appears relatively unchanging across the decade, not only in the kinds of products that are advertised, but also in the nature of the appeals. The advertising here is less about showing, more about telling: it remains largely functional and descriptive, and there is less emphasis on style and symbolism – and certainly less on any form of 'glamour'. In these respects, it appears curiously old-fashioned when compared with the equivalent consumer appeals that are being made to girls at the same time.

Resisting commerce

Of course, there were publications that attempted to avoid or resist these developments. Two of the longest-established children's magazines in the United States are particularly notable here: the bi-monthly *Jack and Jill* and the monthly *Highlights for Children*. *Jack and Jill* was initially published in 1938 by Curtis Publishing, which also published the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Throughout its first two decades, under the editorship of Ada Campbell Rose, it billed itself as 'the better magazine for boys and girls'. *Highlights*, first published in 1946, was even more sanctimonious: describing itself as 'fun with a purpose', it

claimed 'this book of wholesome fun is dedicated to helping children grow in basic skills and knowledge, in creativeness, in ability to think and reason, in sensitivity to others, in high ideals and worthy ways of living – for CHILDREN are the world's most important people'. Clearly targeted at aspirational parents rather than children directly, broadly educational magazines of this kind are a perennial feature of the children's market (British equivalents during the same period include *The Young Elizabethan* and *Look and Learn*).[47]

Such publications typically present themselves as a positive alternative to commercial media. In terms of content, *Jack and Jill* was resolutely wholesome: it contained traditional stories and fairy tales, puzzles, art and craft activities, state flags to colour in, and factual feature articles about history and science. It did not carry advertising, and there was little indication that its child readers were living in an increasingly media-saturated environment: there was no mention of movies, pop music, comic characters or television, and very little of commercial toys. *Highlights* frequently featured moralistic stories about good behaviour, obedience, safety and good manners; and both publications contained advice pages for parents, giving guidance on follow-up activities, or where to obtain further reading.

However, towards the end of the 1950s, *Jack and Jill* began to change. Ada Campbell Rose was replaced by two younger editors, Nancy Ford and Jean La Wall, who took the magazine in a more modern direction. Across the issues I examined from 1959 and 1960, there is an increasing amount of material relating to other media, particularly television: we move from Shirley Temple and Mother Goose to *Lassie*, Hanna-Barbera cartoons, *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and Disney, with series previews, profiles of the stars and behind-the-scenes photography. In 1962, *Jack and Jill* eventually began to take external advertising, although its entry into the commercial media market remained quite restricted, probably for fear of alienating its parental market. Symptomatically, it is now published by the Children's Better Health Institute, a non-profit division of the Saturday Evening Post Society; it regularly wins 'Parents Choice' magazine awards. By contrast, *Highlights* has remained pure: aside from the occasional ads for book clubs and encyclopaedias, it still does not carry advertising to this day.

Of course, it would be an illusion to regard these magazines as 'non-commercial'. They may carry no advertising, or only a limited amount, but they are nevertheless commercial products in themselves. Like educational toys, they appeal to a particular market niche, and they do well in this respect: sales in the 1950s may have been only in the tens of thousands, but current figures are upwards of two million. However, what we can see here is a gradual process of commercialization and mediatization – albeit more in publications aimed at girls, and less so in those that are targeted primarily at a parent market. However, in order to explore advertising to children more directly, it's necessary to turn to other print publications, and to television. In the following sections, I look at examples of advertising for two major product categories: food (especially snacks and breakfast cereals) and toys.

Consuming kids: food marketing

At several points, I've suggested that seemingly modern advertising and marketing strategies – including those that generate concern among present-day campaigners – were quite evident in this much earlier period. In this section, I'd like to illustrate this by discussing the marketing for two ranges of food products, as they developed over the 1950s. The first of these relates specifically to popsicles (flavoured ice-cream snacks, mainly served on a stick); while the second looks more broadly at breakfast cereal. Alongside some other sources, I'm particularly drawing on archival material from the Hartman Center at Duke University: the collection contains examples of ads themselves, as well as promotional material, research reports, memos and correspondence aimed at sales agents, distributors and retailers.

Case study 1: Popsicles

Popsicles were invented in 1905 by an 11-year-old Californian boy named Frank Epperson. He launched the products on the market in the early 1920s, receiving a patent in 1924; and the name was apparently changed from 'Epsicle' to 'Popsicle' at the insistence of his own children. Epperson did not own the company for long, however: finding himself broke, he sold it in 1925 to the Joe Lowe Company of New York, who owned the rights for more than sixty years.

Many of the marketing strategies used by the Lowe company during the 1950s were far from new: in fact, they were very similar to those described by Evalyne Grumbine in the late 1930s. Straightforward advertising obviously played a key role. Full-colour spreads aimed at the family audience were run in Sunday newspapers, and in mass-circulation magazines like *Life* (whose sales at this time were around five million). Children were targeted more specifically through ads in prestigious magazines like *American Girl* and *Boys' Life*, and in comic books – although in the wake of the campaigns against so-called 'horror comics' earlier in the decade[48], this was confined to those that were considered 'clean' or 'parent-approved'. Billboards, posters and point-of-sale displays (including decals for shop windows) were also part of the advertising mix; as was television, which I'll come to shortly.

However, the marketing strategies became more diverse and elaborate as the decade progressed. Advertising in the early 1950s largely focused on the qualities of the products themselves (most obviously claims about taste). However, children were shown enjoying the product in an increasing range of settings – ads with a summer beach theme were joined by others featuring snow scenes, and in 1958 (in the wake of Sputnik) by a 'space travel' theme. Promotion also focused increasingly on extraneous strategies such as premium offers (inexpensive 'free' gifts like pens and plastic jewellery) and children's competitions. Some of the thousands of prizes apparently on offer here were far from trivial: by 1957 and 1958, successful contestants and their families were being offered all-expense-paid one week vacations in Hollywood or New York, alongside a wide range of high-tech appliances and gadgets. These offers and competitions were also reinforced by direct-mail marketing: one 1958 memo boasts that prize lists had reached twenty million children.

In its efforts to increase sales, the company also diversified its product range, enabling it to make repeated claims about the advent of 'new' products and flavours. Simple popsicles were joined by 'dreamsicles', 'fudgesicles', 'creamsicles' and so on, as well as 'niftees', 'sidewalk sundaes' and 'cho-cho' malted milk drinks. In stores, customers were offered small free samples of new flavours and products, which were actually mixed and frozen on the spot using special equipment provided by the company.

Some of the 'behind-the-scenes' aspects of this can be glimpsed in the publicity materials targeting retailers – who were unashamedly told how advertising was being used to '*sell* your young customers right on their living room floor', and how it could 'pre-sell the entire family on your brands'. Retailers were urged to renew their sales displays regularly, and take advantage of new flavours and product lines appearing. A 'Blue Chip Plan' of incentives was offered to retailers and to distributors – that is, the delivery drivers – who would earn bonuses and 'merit coupons' for good sales, and could go on to choose from a very extensive catalogue featuring over 1500 gifts.

One seemingly modern aspect here is what might today be called 'participatory marketing'. This included, but often went beyond, straightforward approaches like getting consumers to send in wrappers and complete advertising jingles. In 1957, for example, the company was running 'Popsi-Doodle' contests, in which consumers were invited to cut out the red 'sicle' emblem from the product wrappers and then utilize them in creating doodles or drawings – again in the hope of winning significant prizes. Consumers are undoubtedly 'active' here, although their activity is effectively focused around the brand name and logo.

Another seemingly modern strategy was the use of trans-media 'tie-ins' – an approach that has a long history, but which only began to generate much concern among campaigners in the 1970s and 1980s. This took several forms. The Lowe company sponsored a 'Popsicle Comedy Party' TV show (a half hour broadcast on late Saturday afternoons, especially during the peak summer sales months), which appeared on 120 stations nationwide. It also bought into sponsorship of existing shows, including *Lone Ranger*, *Sir Lancelot* and *American Bandstand*; and here again, the memos to retailers emphasise the numbers of stations involved, and the potential audience size (*American Bandstand* apparently delivered '49 million home messages'). Other early partners in this period included Ringling Brothers, owners of the Barnum and Bailey travelling circus (famously billed as 'The Greatest Show on Earth'): popsicle products were endorsed by circus performers, advertised in the Barnum and Bailey magazine, and marketed at the circus itself (in a form of 'event marketing'); while circus characters and themes were featured in advertising, in-store displays and product packaging.

Perhaps the most notable of the company's media partnerships in this respect was with Disney. Like Mattel's toys, popsicles were being advertised on Disney's TV shows from their inception in 1955; and the connection was reinforced by packaging and in-store displays featuring Disney characters. Customers were offered Donald Duck-themed 'Ducky Dubble' or 'Kreami-Frost' ices, alongside others featuring Dumbo, Pinocchio, and Goofy. (Disney, meanwhile, boasted of its impressive reach, claiming 4000 million monthly 'impressions' – 30 for every American.) Children were also invited to join the 'Ducky Dubble Club of America', which boasted several local

chapters and an official charter, along with badges, membership cards and prizes for members.

All these activities were planned in line with insights from market research. Memos and briefing reports for sales agents and retailers repeatedly emphasise how 'research' has demonstrated the effectiveness of particular strategies such as free samples, new flavours, and regularly updated point-of-sale advertising. One striking example of this in the Hartman Center collection is a map of the city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which is presumably one of many: it shows the quantities of traffic circulation on the city's primary thoroughfares in order to identify the most favourable locations for billboards and illuminated posters. The level of detail, and hence financial investment, is remarkable.

What we can see in this one example, therefore, is a combination of several familiar promotional strategies: straightforward advertising, across a range of media; packaging; in-store activities and displays; competitions, clubs and other participatory activities; media sponsorship and merchandising; and the diversification of the product range itself. As I've suggested, very few of these strategies were especially innovative: even the television-related activities had their precedents in radio. Yet the scale of the marketing, and the integration between the various components, does represent a kind of step change. It could well be compared to approaches that would today be called 'integrated' or '360-degree' marketing: the aim is to create a kind of synergy between the different forms of promotion that makes the brand much more difficult to avoid.

Case study 2: breakfast cereal

Like popsicles, breakfast cereal is obviously not just a children's product: indeed, it is mostly purchased by adults, even if they may do so partly in response to children's 'pester power'. Today, amid concerns about child obesity and the advertising of 'HFSS' (high in fat, salt and sugar) foods, it has become a somewhat controversial product. In this respect, it's ironic to recall that the origins of ready-to-eat cold breakfast cereal were as a health food. Its leading pioneer was John Harvey Kellogg (1851-1943), a Seventh Day Adventist who directed a sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, originally known as the Western Health Reform Institute. An advocate of temperance and sexual abstinence, and a campaigner against masturbation, Kellogg began to develop 'anaphrodisiac' vegetarian foods that would discourage sexual stimulation; and he went on to invent breakfast cereals like Granola and Toasted Corn Flakes.

By the 1950s, breakfast cereals had become a highly lucrative, but also very competitive, business. The market was dominated by an oligopoly of three companies – Kellogg's, General Foods (Post) and General Mills – which represented 85% of the industry between them.[49] The concentrated targeting of children began at this time, with the development of an ever-broadening range of pre-sweetened products: fibre was reduced and sugar added, in some cases constituting more than 50% by weight. When compared with other areas of the food industry, profit margins were potentially high, but so was the expenditure on advertising. One later

estimate suggested that almost two-thirds of advertising directed at children was for food products, most of which were high in sugar and fat, and low in fibre.[50]

Much of this advertising and promotion was targeted at a general family audience. Ads typically focused on the qualities of the product – convenience and texture (or 'crispness') were as vital as taste – but within this, the appeals to adults and children were rather different.[51] Advertising specifically for adults tended to focus on health benefits, via claims about the importance of protein and fibre. Kellogg's Corn Flakes, for example, were advertised as fortified with Vitamin D ('more sun than ever'), while even Rice Krispies were apparently 'loaded with all the food values of rice'. One 1957 TV ad showed scientists creating 'Kellogg's new food discovery', the apparently protein-rich Special K.

In some cases, these appeals were addressed to the dietary concerns of adult consumers (about constipation and weight control, for example), but they also related to children. Here again, assertions about nutritional value sat alongside claims about convenience. Post oatmeal, for example, was described as 'the best cereal for growing children'; while Corn Flakes were advertised as 'body-building', and Rice Krispies provided 'nourishment without weight'. Cereal was marketed not just as a breakfast staple, but also as a daytime snack food and as part of children's evening meals. A set of British TV ads for Kellogg's featured 'real' mothers in relatively unglamorous circumstances, claiming that eating cereal (for both breakfast and dinner) helped to keep their children's hunger at bay.

By contrast, appeals specifically for children tended to focus on sweetness and 'fun'. They frequently involved premiums ('free' gifts, mail-ins), competitions and media tie-ins. The cereal companies had developed distinctive child-friendly mascots and characters as early as the 1930s: the Rice Krispies elves date back to 1933, although Tony the Tiger (of Kellogg's Frosties) did not make his debut until 1952. These characters subsequently appeared in animated form in TV commercials, but by the end of the 1950s, companies were also making use of licensed cartoon characters, such as Hanna-Barbera's Yogi Bear and the Flintstones, and (in the UK) Enid Blyton's Noddy.

Children were also targeted with premium offers, sometimes in the form of toys included in the packaging, but also via mail-ins (generally of box tops together with 25 cents). Smaller toys, cards and packet cut-outs – from zoo animals and nursery rhyme books to Wild West guns and military aircraft – were offered as collectables; and children were urged to 'ask your mother to get Kellogg's' (an incitement to pester power that would not be permitted today). Several of these premiums also involved media tie-ins. A collection of such gifts from 1955 included 'magic goggles', model cars and a rocket glider, as well as membership of a Rin-Tin-Tin Club, a *Dragnet* detective kit, a Roy Rogers ranch set and Lone Ranger masks. Continuing the Western theme, Quaker cereals even offered a deed of ownership of one square inch of land in 'Yukon Gold Rush Country'. Here again, space travel became a recurring motif towards the end of the decade: Kellogg's Pep, a 'build-up wheat cereal', offered potential space cadets the opportunity to 'step into another world' at breakfast time.

These techniques extended to the family market as well. Alongside Yogi Bear, adult-oriented performers like Groucho Marx were also hawking breakfast cereal; and in 1964, even the Rolling Stones featured in a Rice Krispies commercial. Significantly larger sweepstake prizes were also on offer, mostly targeted at families: for example, in its 1960 campaign General Mills was promising 72 Chevrolet Corvairs, $30,000 of dividend shares and cash prizes of $1 million (equivalent to $8 million today).

By the beginning of the 1960s, however, the market leader Kellogg's appears to have decided to step back from this approach.[52] A 1959 report by its agency, J. Walter Thompson, found little evidence of the sustained effectiveness of premium offers, and even some indications that consumers resented 'gimmicks' of this kind. It also suggested that children only accounted for around one third of the actual consumption of breakfast cereal.[53] While media tie-ins were still apparent in products targeted primarily at children, Kellogg's appeared to shift its emphasis towards the family market. Its magazine campaigns from the early 1960s used full-colour photographs (as distinct from the 'classic' Norman Rockwell illustrations of the mid-1950s): the images began to dominate, occupying as much as 80% of the page. While some were posed scenes of white suburban family life, many featured adults – even enjoying pre-sugared cereal – without children being present at all. Corn Flakes were shown alongside fresh fruit and milk, amid claims about their health-giving qualities (the 'best to you each morning' slogan first appeared in 1959, and some packs also offered coupons for milk or fruit purchases).

These two case studies of food marketing point to a combination of change and continuity in marketing to children during this period. For the most part, the techniques that are being used are not especially novel: with the exception of television, there is little that would have surprised Evalyne Grumbine. At the same time, the scale of the enterprise is significantly greater: the products themselves have diversified; expenditure on marketing has significantly increased; and marketers are making increasing use of research. Marketing has become an integrated phenomenon, which makes increasing use of characters, themes and appeals drawn from other media: consumers are not only consuming products themselves (in this case, quite literally), but also the media that surround and define them.

Television and the mediatization of toys

In the immediate post-War period, the toy industry in the United States was relatively stable and conservative. The business was dominated by a small number of well-established manufacturers like Louis Marx, the Lionel Corporation and A.C. Gilbert; and by stores and mail-order companies like Sears and F.A.O. Schwarz. Many toys were non-branded, and most were generic: model trains and cars, board and card games, construction toys, weapons, science and craft kits, dolls (and their related paraphernalia) and soft toys accounted for the large bulk of sales. As the historian Gary Cross describes[54], toys tended to feature familiar themes: boys were invited to play out fantasies of the Wild West, medieval chivalry or space travel; girls were encouraged to rehearse future adult roles as mothers and housewives.

However, in the years of the baby boom, new products and new companies gradually began to appear. Many toys now regarded as 'classics' were launched at this

time: the Slinky (1945), Mr. Potato Head (1951), Play-Doh (1955) and the Frisbee (1957) among them. New materials, most notably plastics, began to be used; and by the end of the 1950s, new technology toys began to emerge, including talking dolls, electronic vehicles and other 'classics' such as the Etch-a-Sketch (1960). Companies like Hasbro (originally Hassenfeld Brothers) and Fisher-Price, founded in the 1920s and 1930s, along with new entrants like Mattel, founded in 1945, gradually began to challenge the more traditional firms. Meanwhile, as children themselves came to enjoy greater disposable income, the toy industry moved from being a seasonal matter, peaking at Christmas, to a year-round business.

As I've already noted, television began to play an increasingly central role here, not only as a means of advertising, but also of 'branding' toys – and especially character toys. There is a longer history of these kinds of media tie-ins: for example, Shirley Temple, Roy Rogers and Rin Tin Tin all generated significant amounts of merchandising during the inter-War years, as of course did Disney. Yet if media of various forms have always been a factor in the toy industry, the key shift here is to do with the *direction* of that relationship. As well as using media such as television to market existing toys, companies began to source new toys from media in the first place – and media companies were increasingly involved in generating toys through licensing and franchising arrangements. In the process, the boundary between marketing and 'content' became increasingly blurred. This issue became much more explicit in the 1970s and 1980s, when campaigners began to challenge toy-based TV shows, or so-called 'programme-length commercials'; but its origins can be found at least a couple of decades earlier.[55]

Some indications of this can be found in the toy industry trade press at this time.[56] For much of the 1950s, *Playthings*, the leading US publication, was dominated by generic toys. A special supplement, produced in collaboration with *Life* magazine in the run-up to Christmas 1954, featured 104 'top American toys', of which only six were media-related (although of course the whole collection was extensively advertised on television). Most dolls, for example, were generic and anonymous; although some did have names, such as 'Poor Pitiful Pearl' a popular 'ragamuffin' doll of the period, who was intensively marketed on TV. However, hardly any of them were media characters to begin with.

Media-related toys grew in significance over the 1950s. In 1954, *Playthings* was urging retailers to stock Disney merchandise, along with toys relating to younger children's TV shows like *Howdy Doody* and *Ding-Dong School*; but by the end of the decade, this had been joined by a wide range of other TV characters and toys, most notably those from Hanna-Barbera. Nevertheless, the size of the US toy industry, and the dominance of an 'old guard' of conservative companies (Marx, the largest, did not begin advertising until 1959), meant that change in this respect was slow: the large majority of companies who included catalogue inserts in the 660-page March 1960 edition of *Playthings* produced no media-related toys at all.

If anything, this shift appears to have been more dramatic in Britain. In the early 1950s, *Toys and Games*, the leading UK publication, was equally dominated by generic toys, but media-related toys become particularly significant as the decade progressed. While much of this material was American in origin (Disney, Roy Rogers, Superman), a good deal of it related to British television programmes. With

the advent of commercial TV in 1955, established companies like Chad Valley rushed to leap on the bandwagon. *Toys and Games* began to publish TV supplements, with extensive lists of licensees for TV-related products: a 1959 supplement included a 32-page 'Disney Merchandise Directory' featuring over 100 UK manufacturers with Disney franchises. However, this was not confined to the commercial channel: as early as 1954, there were also advertisements and articles about toys relating to BBC programmes (Muffin the Mule, Sooty, *Watch with Mother*), and by the end of the decade, this included US-made shows screened on the BBC, such as *Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Lone Ranger*.

Some of these franchises must have been exceptionally lucrative: Enid Blyton's *Noddy* books generated a considerable amount of spin-off merchandise[57], while Sooty (or his owner, Harry Corbett) had his own toyshop in Bradford in 1957. A September 1960 edition of *Toys and Games* profiled Walter Tuckwell, described as 'the prince of character merchandising': his agency, which began with Enid Blyton characters in 1956, was now handling almost 40 characters from television, cinema and children's books, and dealing with two hundred licensees (there were 84 licences for *Noddy* alone). Licensed characters of this kind were effectively becoming the 'brands' of children's consumer culture: for companies, they offered a means of reducing risk in a fairly volatile market, while also enabling successful properties to be exploited across a range of products and media.[58] Here again, we see a fairly well-developed form of 'mediatization' that only began to attract critical attention some decades later.

Parents, children and play

As I've suggested, the promotion of food products is frequently targeted at a dual market: children and adults are addressed both separately and together, as part of a family market. By contrast, the market for toys might appear to address a 'purer' demographic. Yet while parents might not use toys very much themselves, they certainly buy them; and as such, the marketing of toys has frequently addressed parents as well. Nevertheless, there is a historical shift here. At the beginning of the century, most toy marketing was directed at parents; it took several decades for attention to move primarily to children. Marketers liked to emphasise the intergenerational appeal of toys, showing children and parents enjoying play together. Yet as Gary Cross describes, familiar tensions between children's and parents' imperatives have long been apparent here – tensions, for example, between education and entertainment, between moral worth and mere 'consumerism', between play as a preparation for adult life and play as an opportunity for fantasy.

Advertising in print publications aimed at parents during this period continued to appeal to particular ideas about the educational value of play. Ads in parenting magazines, as well as general publications like *Life* and *New Yorker*, tended to focus on relatively upmarket toys and retail outlets.[59] Parents were assured that toys were 'play tested' and 'age grouped', as well as being safe and durable; educational toys were 'designed under the guidance of child psychologists'; while others (for upmarket brands such as Doepke) were marketed as a means of building healthy bodies. Various forms of quality control were operated: the Toy Guidance Council identified 'educator approved' toys; while magazines like *Parenting* and *Good*

Housekeeping operated their own kite-marking systems. A good deal was also made of 'classic' trusted brands that could be passed on to upcoming generations: 'parents who as youngsters themselves played with Holgate toys, insist on Holgate toys for their own children'. In some instances, such as the range of Steiff 'realistic' animal toys, these were advertised as appealing more directly to adults, not least to 'grown up collectors'.

While there were occasional references here to the 'fun' of play with toys, the key emphasis was on its educational value.[60] Ads for Toy House announced that 'toys are children's tools for learning', which would provide 'a bridge to the future'; a 1957 ad for Meccano construction kits proclaimed their value in teaching 'your boy… to think constructively', and prepare him for a future career in engineering; while Playskool toys offered a free booklet on the 'creative play environment and the proper selection of toys'. These pedagogical ideas were premised on ideas from developmental psychology: according to Matchbox toys, 'psychologists know that correct channeling of young energy helps build character'; while readers of a 1960 *Parents* magazine feature on toys were told that 'In choosing a toy for child, consider his age, his stage, and the toy's promise of encouraging his further development, as well as the immediate pleasure it will give him'. Educational benefits of this kind clearly depended upon parents intervening in their children's play. While some ads featured scenarios of children playing alone or with peers, many of these publications emphasized the value of parental involvement – and particularly of fathers playing with their sons.

This educational value of toys also appeared to derive particularly from their *realism*. Some toys – such as Dinky model vehicles and American Flyer trains – were advertised as 'unsurpassed for realism'; while a Matchbox ad from 1960 promised 'inexhaustible stimulation for play situations that relate to real life'. Other toys were clearly identified as means for children to rehearse aspects of adulthood: a 1960 ad for My Merry, for example, offered miniature replicas of adult brands, including a cosmetics kit for girls and a boy-sized electric razor! (Needless to say, this was for the most part a highly gender-polarised world.)

Across the late 1950s and early 1960s, the style of these advertisements began to shift. In many cases, written copy gradually gave way to larger images, while photographs replaced drawn illustrations: ads for Steiff animal toys, for example, were roughly half copy and half image in the mid-1950s, but by 1962 the written text had almost completely disappeared. There were also some notable shifts in how children were represented: while some ads continued to emphasise tradition, others were developing a more modern image of the child as a powerful agent in its own right – imagery that was to become much more evident in the 1970s.[61] For example, a Mattel campaign from the early 1960s used black-and-white candid shots of children at play, which were clearly intended to appear less posed and more naturalistic. While the toys were relatively traditional – dolls, guns, rocking horses – the children themselves were represented in more active and less idealized ways: they were shown engaging with their peers in their own social worlds, while adults looked on, sometimes with a hint of knowing irony.

Televising toys

By contrast with these publications, television enabled marketers to appeal to children directly, over the heads of parents. As I've suggested, much of this advertising was placed in specific children's slots and programmes that were unlikely to be watched by adults. Television also enabled marketers to generate narratives more effectively: they could show toys 'in action', as well as providing scenarios and models for children's toy play.[62]

One of the leaders in TV marketing was Mattel, which grew from its founding as a tiny start-up in 1945 to become the world's largest toy company. Mattel's Barbie doll is often seen as its defining product. Launched in 1959, it was phenomenally successful, and has fuelled endless debates among successive generations of feminists.[63] Yet Mattel produced a much broader range of toys, and its success as a company was particularly down to its effective use of television. As I've noted, Mattel took a gamble as one of the early investors in sponsoring Disney's *Mickey Mouse Club* in 1955, at the instigation of the advertising executive Cy Schneider, who was then at the start of his career. It went on to sponsor other shows – in the early 1960s, its characters Matty Mattel and his sister Belle were hosting *Matty's Funday Funnies*, a cartoon compilation (and arguably one of the first 'programme length commercials').

One striking aspect of Mattel advertising at this time is its emphasis on the company name itself. Ads – whether they were for Barbies, 'Burp guns', Beanie and Cecil merchandise, or any number of a growing range of other toys – all featured the distinctive logo, and closed with the familiar slogans: 'You can tell it's Mattel, it's swell' and 'You can buy them wherever toys are sold'. Yet Mattel, like other companies, also made frequent use of media tie-ins: we have Dick Tracy guns and wrist radios; Beanie and Cecil games, puppets and bath toys; and music boxes featuring Casper the Friendly Ghost, Popeye and a full range of Disney characters.

As a product, Barbie also exemplifies a strategy that became increasingly important in the toy business at this time: accessorizing and collectability. While the doll herself was relatively inexpensive, the never-ending range of her outfits and accessories – and the growing addition of other options within the same product line – clearly helped to maximize spending. This tendency is apparent in other toy advertising as well. Over time, toys like guns and dolls gradually acquire a greater range of functions and accessories: a gun can be fired in an increasing variety of ways (using caps, or water, or with various attachments); a talking doll called Chatty Cathy can say five different things, then eleven, and eventually 120; and the doll then acquires a stroller that works in nine different ways. Meanwhile, other toys are re-purposed and recombined, as the same characters appear across an ever-widening range of merchandise: for example, Cecil the Turtle (from the puppet and then animation show *Beany and Cecil*) appears in the form of a plush puppet, a board game, a disguise kit, a music box, and eventually as a talking doll.

These developments reflect broader imperatives that were becoming increasingly apparent in the consumer market much more broadly at this time. On the one hand, we can see a form of *planned obsolescence* in the children's market: you need to replace last year's three-way gun with this year's 10-way version, or buy the new doll with the seemingly unlimited capacity for chat. Accessorization also encourages

accumulation: you need to buy the doll house furniture, collect the ever-increasing range of new outfits, or buy the caps and targets and the new 'dura-hide' holster to go with your gun. The actual range of toys themselves remains fairly limited – there are dolls for girls and guns for boys, and board games for both – but this process of re-purposing and accessorizing helps to fuel continuing sales.

In this context, much of the advertising places a major emphasis on *demonstration*. Children have to be instructed (by expert adults, or authoritative adult voice-overs) on how to use the new functions or accessories: how to load a gun, exchange the recording discs on a talking doll, assemble the furniture in a Barbie house, or use the remote control on a rocket launcher. It appears that considerable explanation is required as to the differences between a cap-firing saddle gun and a shooting shell gun, or about how to shift between a 'moving fire-bolt action' and an 'air-cooled smoking barrel'. What Alison Alexander and her colleagues describe as 'loud, enthusiastic narration' and 'pedantic repetition of salient product attributes' are certainly apparent.[64] Play, it would appear, is active, but it also requires expert instruction.

While realism was a key dimension of the educational value of play in ads for parents, it figures in a rather different way in ads for children. In the case of dolls, there are frequent assurances that their hair 'feels real', or that they can talk and walk (and in some cases, urinate) like 'real' babies. In other cases, much is made of the realism of accessories. In one ad (probably from the early 1960s), 'Susie' is shown wishing for a dream house for her Barbie doll, with 'a lamp that really lights', 'two convertible sofa beds' with upholstery using 'real decorator fabric', and 'a bed with a removable headboard and a three-drawer dresser'. Meanwhile in boy world, Mattel's 'Winchester Shooting Shell Rifle' is 'the only toy rifle that looks real enough to carry that famous name'; the 'Colt Six-Shooter' is 'just like the rifle hand-made by Western gunsmiths'; while the 'Thunderburp' is 'really for real, right down to the adjustable flip sight'. In some instances, as in ads directed at parents, toys are presented as a means of rehearsing aspects of adult life. For example, Marx Toys' 'Budding Beauty Vanity' kit is said to contain 'make-up just like mummy uses' – and the girl is shown applying it alongside her mother, who is doing the same at a full-size table.

Here, children are effectively being shown how to play, by entering into a fantasy scenario. This is most obvious in the case of the song that frequently featured in Barbie commercials: 'Barbie, you're beautiful / You can make me feel / My Barbie doll is really real'. Barbie offered a fantasy of young adult life that still lay some years ahead, but one that girls could rehearse in their play: as the song continues, 'Some day I'm gonna be exactly like you / Till then I know just what I'll do… / Barbie, beautiful Barbie, I'll make believe that I am you'. Girls in the ads are often shown blurring or merging into their Barbie figures: as 'Susie' falls asleep, she effectively dreams herself into her fantasy Barbie house as a semi-transparent ghostly figure.

This process of crossing a line into fantasy in order to assume a new (but somehow also 'real') identity also featured in advertisements for boys. In an ad for the 'Swivel Shot Play Holster', a film director congratulates the boy on the speed of his gun-play, and gives him a part in the Western movie he is making; in another, a boy is shown falling asleep and dreaming himself into a scenario where he is using his 'Little Burp

Gun' to protect the earth from an alien 'saucer man' (while his father looks on benevolently); while another boy collaborates with an 'Indian', using his 'Buffalo Hunter Set' to take part in a back-projected buffalo hunt. Meanwhile, both girls and boys are shown (unusually in the same ad) using 'Strum-Fun' guitars' to deceive a television audience that they can really play.

Where the ads for parents place a central emphasis on the educational value of play, ads for children focus largely on its pleasurable dimensions, and particularly on the dimension of fantasy. Yet even here, it seems, children are in need of guidance and instruction. The prominence of mediation (movies, television) and of dreaming in several of the examples I've described is quite striking: the children enter into another world, but it is one that is clearly marked as a fabrication, or as a dream – and in many cases, adults are also on hand to offer guidance or commentary. Arriving at the 'correct' understanding of the relationship between reality and fantasy remains vital: we don't want children to get too carried away.

Mediatization and play

What consequences did this process of mediatization have for toys, and for children's play? While there was certainly some innovation in the toys themselves at this time, most of the basic categories of toys remained familiar. Most toys were anonymous and generic. Yet the media branding and promotion of toys brought in scenarios and narratives that were much more specific. Children didn't just have a generic soft toy – they had a Cecil toy, or a Yogi Bear toy, which they could use to rehearse typical catchphrases and actions they had seen in the cartoons. Boys didn't just have a generic gun – they had a Lone Ranger gun, or a Dick Tracy snub-nose pistol gun, whose many features had been demonstrated in the TV commercials. Girls didn't just have an anonymous doll, they had a Barbie, whom they could dress and accessorize in order to act out the experiences and adventures they had seen in countless TV ads. For parents, getting your children to take a bath would be significantly easier with Alvin and the Chipmunks soaky bath toys, or Disney soap bars, and perhaps even with bubble bath themed on *The Mummy* or *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (or possibly not).

Of course, it would be simplistic to suggest that children's play had become wholly determined or 'colonised' by media – and that children's supposedly spontaneous 'imagination' had been destroyed as a result. Media certainly played an increasing part in shaping what they knew about toys, and how they might use them. But toys can evidently be used in a wide variety of ways – and even in ways that subvert or challenge the intentions of their designers. Contemporary studies clearly show how media content is not just rehearsed but also 'remixed', recombined and reworked in children's play. Historical evidence on this is obviously harder to obtain, but such diverse and even subversive uses of toys are apparent in some of the autobiographical recollections of Barbie fans in particular.[65] Evidence from studies by Iona and Peter Opie, conducted in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, also suggests that this was the case in earlier, seemingly much less 'media-saturated' times.[66]

Moving towards regulation

In the United States, attempts to regulate advertising and marketing to children have an uneven history. There were some vague attempts at regulation prior to the Second World War, mainly in response to broader concerns about the amount of money that was being spent on advertising. But in the decades following the War the increasingly intimate connections between advertisers, media companies and corporations on the one hand, and government on the other, largely precluded this. As the historian Dawn Spring has shown, the advertising industry was centrally involved in attempts to promote the American 'free enterprise' system, both at home and overseas – a system that was represented as a fundamental guarantee of individual liberty.[67]

Concerns specifically relating to children slowly began to surface in the mid-1960s. Initially, the focus was on misleading claims and techniques, especially in toy advertising.[68] As early as 1964, the Federal Trade Commission banned a series of ads by the Ideal Toy Company, which apparently suggested that a battery-operated mechanical robot was voice-controlled. This was followed by charges against celebrity endorsements of toys. By the early 1970s, the FTC was becoming more assertive: in 1971, it issued a series of cease and desist orders against Mattel and other toy companies, pointing to the use of misleading visual perspectives, editing techniques and special effects that served to accentuate the performance of certain toys. In its words, these techniques could be considered deceptive, 'taking account of the knowledge, sophistication, maturity, and experience of the child audience'. In the early 1970s, further orders were issued against other toy companies, some of whom (such as Milton Bradley and Avalon Industries) appeared to be serial offenders: despite potential fines of $20,000, there was continuing doubt as to whether they were complying. Meanwhile, in 1972 the Federal Communications Commission began a series of hearings to consider the broader issues at stake – not least the basic dependence of children's television upon advertising.

These actions came about partly in response to public campaigns, especially the work of Action for Children's Television, which was formed in 1968. The target for ACT was not only misleading advertising techniques, or the sheer amount of advertising, but the fact that the television system itself was based on commercial funding: this, it argued, fundamentally precluded public service objectives, such as the provision of educational content for children.[69] One particular target was the rise of 'programme-length commercials' for toys, which began with Mattel's *Hot Wheels* cartoon series in 1969, and really took off in the late 1970s and 1980s. For its part, the advertising industry pushed back against ACT: the American Association of Advertising Agencies argued that there was very little public concern about advertising to children, and cited its own surveys purporting to show that the vast majority of people supported it.[70] During the 1970s, the FCC was moderately sympathetic to the campaigners (for example, it banned 'host selling'). However, under the Reagan administration of the 1980s, regulation was largely abolished: in 1984, for example, an FCC order permitted 'product-based programs', cancelling an earlier ban.

There is a longer history to be told here, which is well beyond the scope of this essay.[71] However, it is interesting to consider why marketing to children became a public issue when it did. As I've suggested, many of the techniques that subsequent campaigners found so objectionable date back even before the period I've been considering here. Yet these practices were not at all controversial at the time. The 1950s and 1960s did see a step change – partly through the use of television, and the explosion of market research – but it wasn't until the 1970s that the issue really began to appear on the radar of public debate. It was only at this time that marketers and businesses began to see the need to push back at their critics, or moderate their claims about the power of advertising.

Conclusion

The issue of children's relationship with media – and with consumer culture – is often a focus for much broader concerns.[72] The idea of childhood serves as a convenient vehicle for what might be called 'symbolic politics' – and for wider anxieties about just about any social problem one might care to name. This occasionally reaches the spectacular dimensions of so-called 'moral panics', but it is a much more general, and often more diffuse, phenomenon. In the wake of the social movements of the 1960s, concern about children and advertising became a proxy for much broader arguments about the shortcomings of consumer capitalism; although it also provided a focus for much more conservative anxieties about cultural and moral decline. By invoking the issue in this way, campaigners on both sides were able to press emotional buttons in their efforts to command wider support – and of course 'innocent children' is one of the most powerful emotional buttons of all. This isn't to imply that such campaigns were somehow misplaced, or dishonest. However, I would suggest that this approach can distract attention from the much bigger issues at stake, and lead one to ignore their difficulty and complexity.

Critical analysis of advertising and marketing almost invariably tends to overestimate its power. Advertising is often regarded as a form of mass deception that sustains consumer capitalism much more broadly. It is a 'magic system', which persuades us that happiness, self-worth and identity can be achieved solely through consumption. For their part, marketers are often keen to proclaim the power and effectiveness of advertising; yet when they come under public criticism, they often step back from such claims. Advertisers frequently argue that they are merely offering a mirror to society – and as such, it is bound to reflect back our materialism, greed and vanity, as well as our other social prejudices.[73] In my view, both sides of this argument tend to be overstated; and the polarization between them is quite unhelpful.

Advertising alone did not create a 'consumer society': whatever such a term ultimately means, this was a much longer and more complex historical development. This essay has focused on a small slice of a much longer narrative. In many respects, there are continuities between this period and earlier times. Nevertheless, the period of the post-war baby boom did see some significant shifts, not just in the quantity of marketing to children, but also in how children were understood, described and targeted. Television allowed a much more intensive 'mediatization' of marketing to children, which fundamentally transformed the nature of the children's

market; market research enabled advertisers to target children more accurately, or at least to imagine that they were doing so.

We can only speculate about the longer-term consequences of this. By the late 1960s, at least some of the children of the baby boom had gone on to vociferously reject the culture of consumerism – although many returned to it with a vengeance in the 1980s. From the hippies to the yuppies, these changes may have been little more than rhetorical fashion. Yet arguably, the emphasis on consumption as a key arena for individual choice, autonomy and self-expression that was key to the marketing practices of this period has had a much more profound and lasting influence.

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David Buckingham
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NOTES

[1] Seiter (1993) provides a good critique of these arguments. See also Buckingham (1995).

[2] My book *The Material Child* (2011) includes a brief overview of the history of marketing to children, as well as a critical overview of contemporary concerns. More extended historical accounts include Cook (2004), Kline (1993) and Seiter (1993). Useful studies of earlier periods include Denisoff (2008) on the nineteenth century and Jacobson (2004) on the early twentieth century.

[3] See the note on archival sources at the end of the essay. In trawling through children's magazines and the trade press, for example at the New York Public Library, I was able to sample specific years in a systematic and comprehensive way. With respect to television, I have mainly used Ira Gallen's extensive private collection, which might appropriately be described as a 'fan archive'; while the UK television material comes mainly from the History of Advertising Trust (online). It's impossible to know how far either of these collections is representative.

[4] Statistics in this section are from: Baby Boomer Headquarters site: https://www.bbhq.com/bomrstat.htm; Statista.com: https://www.statista.com/chart/18418/real-mean-and-median-family-income-in-the-us/; Buffalo History: http://www.buffalohistory.org/Explore/Exhibits/virtual_exhibits/wheels_of_power/educ_materials/television_handout.pdf; Douglas Galbi https://www.galbithink.org/ad-spending.htm; as well as Fox (1984) and Kern (2015).

[5] Useful histories here include Cohen (2003) and Spring (2011).

[6] See Fox (1984).

[7] My account in this section draws particularly on Kline (1993), Cross (1997), Pecora (1998) and Alexander et al. (1998).

[8] Barcus (1962) notes a decline in advertising to children in newspapers between 1947 and 1955, particularly in ads using a 'dramatic' format, with characters and storylines (for example in comic-strip format).

[9] A.J. Vogt, 'The changing face of the children's market', *Sales Management*, 18th December 1964.

[10] Several such studies are cited in Alexander et al. (1998), of which the most notable is one by Munn (1958) on parental influence.

[11] Vogt, op. cit.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See Cook (2004), who discusses these developments mainly in relation to children's clothing.

[14] See Cross (1997), Chapter 4.

[15] Today this has become the focus of a different form of consumerism among adults: new collectable merchandise is still being produced. See https://www.ufdc.org/ufdc-museum-exhibit-campbell-kids-grace-drayton/

[16] Seiter (1993), Chapter 1. On the ambivalent early response to television, up to the mid-1950s, see also Spigel (1992).

[17] On this, see also Sammond (2005).

[18] Helitzer and Heyel (1970).

[19] JWT London Office Records, Hartman Center, Duke University: Box 1.

[20] Cook (2000).

[21] A couple of these, by Munn (1958) and Barcus (1962), are included in my references and others are cited by Alexander et al. (1998). In a bibliography of the field, published in 1991, James McNeal presents his own PhD (completed in 1964) as 'the first study of children's consumer behavior' – although he appears to ignore the work of market researchers like Grumbine, Gilbert and others, many of whose arguments about child consumers seem to prefigure his own.

[22] *Children as Consumers*: Marketing Study Series 9, Bureau of Business Research, University of Texas at Austin, 1964.

[23] These studies and press reports were mostly accessed in the Hartman Center collection at Duke University, especially in the 'Vertical Files' of the J. Walter Thompson agency. Some newspaper and trade magazine reports were also consulted in the New York Public Library collection.

[24] Its director, Dr. Herman Remmers, published a book entitled *The American Teenager*, co-authored with D.H. Radler, in 1957.

[25] Helitzer and Heyel (1970) estimate that, by the end of the 1960s, *Seventeen* had conducted 300 such studies.

[26] 'Free association' was used in a study of *Jack and Jill* magazine by the E.L. Reilly agency around 1964; while the use of visual methods was discussed in a more academic study by William Wells (1965), a Rutgers University professor who was engaged as a consultant by the marketing company Benton and Bowles.

[27] See Helitzer and Heyel (1970).

[28] Grumbine (1938): 21.

[29] There is a much longer history of marketing in schools that tends to be ignored by contemporary critics of the commercialization of education.

[30] See Cook (2000).

[31] Gilbert's work and career are discussed by (among others) James Gilbert (1986), Osgerby (2002) and Palladino (1996); although he was also subject to a striking critique at the time by Dwight McDonald (1958).

[32] See the early profile of Gilbert, then aged 19, in 'How do you rate with kids?', *The American* vol. 140: 153, December 1945.

[33] 'Teenage tasters, *Newsweek* vol. 38, December: 77-78.

[34] 'If I were looking for a job', *The American* vol. 150: 32-3, September 1950; 'Why today's teenagers seem so different', *Harper's Magazine* November 1959: 76-79.

[35] This distinction is developed further by McNeal (e.g. 1992).

[36] I discuss contemporary examples of this in youth marketing in Buckingham (2014).

[37] *New York Times*, 20th June 1966.

[38] See, for example, 'Why today's teenagers seem so different', above.

[39] 'Young Jane really old-fashioned girl', *The Austin Statesman* 15th August 1957; Gilbert, *Marketing*, op cit., 135.

[40] Helitzer and Heyel (1970): 99.

[41] Ibid: chapter 7.

[42] Ibid: 18.

[43] Kyle Asquith (2015) makes a good case that contemporary forms of data mining and consumer surveillance were prefigured by the collection of box tops in the 1920s and 1930s.

[44] See Spigel (1992).

[45] I haven't been able to find historical figures, but the current membership of both Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations in the US is claimed to be around 3 million each (there are slightly more girls than boys).

[46] I reviewed complete copies of both magazines from the years 1954, 1957 and 1961.

[47] My own parents subscribed to *Look and Learn* on my behalf in the early 1960s, although I confess that I rarely read it.

[48] These campaigns in the US are described by David Hajdu (2008).

[49] See Scanlon (1969). There was increasing pressure by the end of the 1960s to 'deconcentrate' the industry.

[50] Gamble and Cotugna (1999): this is based on figures from the 1970s-1990s, although there's little reason to doubt that this was also the case in the period I'm considering here.

[51] The ads I'm referring to in this section come mainly from the J. Walter Thompson collection at Duke University. I have also made use of Ira Gallen's video collections of TV ads; and the British TV ads come from the History of Advertising Trust online collection.

[52] Over the 1950s, Kellogg's market share had increased from around 40% to 55%.

[53] 'Premiums and the ready-to-eat cereal market', report by J. Walter Thompson agency, October 1959; also 'Report of a consumer survey: pre-sweetened cereals', conducted for Kellogg's by the British Market Research Bureau, both in the Hartman Center collection.

[54] Cross (1997).

[55] Probably the best critique of this is Engelhardt (1986). See also Kline (1993) and Cross (1997).

[56] I compared issues of *Playthings* (US) and *Toys and Games* (UK) from 1953-4, 1956-7 and 1959-60, held in the New York Public Library. It's obviously impossible to say how far these publications, or the ads they carried, directly reflected actual sales. Some information here also comes from toy catalogues in the Hartman Center collection.

[57] I discuss some aspects of this in my essay 'The Blyton enigma: changing critical perspectives on children's popular culture': https://davidbuckingham.net/growing-up-modern/the-blyton-enigma-changing-critical-perspectives-on-childrens-popular-culture/

[58] See Pecora (1998), particularly Chapters 2 and 3.

[59] My sample here is drawn from the 'competitive advertisements' files in the J. Walter Thompson archive at the Hartman Center, between 1955 and 1964.

[60] These issues are discussed in detail in Ellen Seiter's (1993) analysis of *Parents* magazine.

[61] See Holland (2004), especially Chapter 4.

[62] My account here is primarily based on Ira Gallen's collection, accessed via his website (https://www.tvdays.com/) and in videotape compilations at the Paley Center. There's no way of knowing how representative these ads might be.

[63] I discuss some of this in my book *The Material Child* (2011). For one entertaining example among many, see Lord (2004).

[64] Alexander et al. (1998): 10.

[65] See, for example, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2000).

[66] See Marsh and Bishop (2013); Willett et al. (2013).

[67] Spring (2011).

[68] Information here comes from files relating to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, at the Hartman Center, Duke University.

[69] These arguments were elaborated in a book by the academic William Melody (1973).

[70] This research was conducted by Roper Research Associates in 1972, and was cited in a statement to the FCC by AAAA Chairman Seymour Banks in January 1973.

[71] Critical accounts of the work of ACT and its associates can be found in Seiter (1993) and Hendershot (1998). Pecora (1998) also recounts the broader history of regulation.

[72] I've discussed this issue (endlessly) elsewhere: the most relevant discussion here would be in the first couple of chapters of Buckingham (2011).

[73] See, for example, Fox (1984).