

The damaging effect that marketers can have if they choose to use this ability to manipulate is huge – it is widely thought that the food industry's promotion and strong communication campaigns of energy dense food directed to children is a very real contributor to the 43 million children under the age of five who are now considered overweight (Dias and Agante, 2011). The rise of advergames – 'online games designed for the specific purpose of marketing a single brand or product' (Winkler and Buckler, 2006) – has been particularly concerning. 73% of major food advertisers' websites contained advergames in 2005, and the attraction to the child of the fun dimension of the game leaves them open to manipulation, increasing their brand knowledge through brand/product interaction and rewarding them for consuming or manipulating the desired food item, or mastering the game. This translates into children's food requests – Mallinckrodt and Mizerski (2007) looked at branded cereal advergames, and found that while children perceived fruit as being healthier than the advertised cereal, they still planned to request the cereal after playing the advergame. Children consumers choose significantly more snacks advertised on advergames than those not advertised, and as these are typically unhealthy foods, this could be seen as being a driving force in a worldwide obesity epidemic.

On the other hand, the argument is that advertising is a key part of consumer socialization, defined as 'the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their effective functioning as consumers in the marketplace' (Ward, 1974). Children's 'pester power' to get what they want through their parents could be seen as a result of the manipulative power of advertising, OR as a natural part of children's consumer socialization, which is important for their identity and social relations with other children. In this case, rather than the advertisers or retailers, the responsibility for avoiding this becoming a confrontational situation lies in good, responsible parenting. The ethical context of the child-parent purchase relationship can be seen as parents responsibly managing a child's natural inclination to request desired products by acknowledging that the child has rights to self-determination that must be respected. Acuff wrote in 1997 that children should have access to empowering goods that contribute to self-development, but not to disempowering or harmful goods, and I think for me this is where the distinction lies.

Finally, marketers and retailers also have a responsibility to recognize children as primary consumers in their own right, which could be seen as linked to their socialization. 18.7% of the \$396 billion children's market in 2000 was made up of primary purchases, and yet fewer than 30% of the retailers in Nicholls and Cullen's 2004 experiment acknowledged children in their store layout, and not many more considered children in designing their displays. It appears that children are overlooked, and parents or other adults continue to be seen as more important in terms of purchases. This widespread operational rejection by UK retailers of children having rights or values as primary customers is unethical and uncommercial, and marketers and retailers have much to gain from reassessing their attitude to children as customers, and reflecting this in a more child-orientated layout, merchandising and staff training initiatives aimed at making stores more child friendly. This is particularly true given the rise of online shopping driven by the 'digital natives', adolescents are increasing their peer communication about consumer choices and behaviours, and with that their role as consumers is gaining momentum. Children are