Impact of the Commercial World on Children & Young People

NSPCC Consultation

The views expressed in this report are from children and young people who access the NSPCC's services and activities. Their views are not necessarily the views of the NSPCC.

NSPCC

Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

Assessing the Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing – NSPCC Consultation

Executive Summary

Over 130 children and young people aged 10 to 21 years old took part in the consultation. The key points to highlight include:

Access to Advertising
- The Internet and TV are the **most effective** means to get messages out to young people. Post, Leaflets and Radio are felt to be the **least effective** means and methods.
- Internet, followed by TV and then Buses are the **most relevant** places to advertise to young people. Youth clubs, Newspapers and Job Centres are felt to be the **least relevant** places to advertise.
- The **most intrusive** places were the Internet, Post (direct mail) and Radio. The **least intrusive** were felt to be Clothing, Post Office and Transport.

Power and Influence
- **Influencing factors** that young people use when considering to purchase include: advertising medium (relevance and effectiveness are particularly used), uniqueness of product, risk of theft, cost and incentives.

Young People's Views of Power and Control
- The young people felt they had **more than 50% control** on spending on clothes and entertainment.
- They had **less than 50% control** on spending on phone and internet.
- Most of the young people felt that they had a **lack of say in family decisions** about shared resources.
- They gave mixed views about the **impact of peer pressure** on purchasing decisions, with the majority not feeling influenced by their peers.
- **Money** is the main motivating factor for young people asking parents to buy goods.

Young People's Views of Shopping
- Nearly half of the responses to what young people like about shopping were orientated around the **process**. These included power and access of choice as a key positive.
- **Access to shopping**, including issues such as queues and getting to the shops was the most negative aspect for young people. This was very closely followed by types of shopping, with food / grocery shopping being the least popular.

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NSPCC Consultation

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Introduction

The NSPCC invited the DCSF to consult with children and young people attending the PINGU (Participation in NSPCC Groups Unite) event on the 29th to 31st July 2008.

Over 130 children and young people from the ages of 10 to 21 years old attended the residential. The children and young people are connected to the NSPCC through our child protection services, fundraising, communications, public policy and campaigning activities. The majority of young people attending the event were in the 13 to 18 year old age range.

The children and young people came from across the 4 nations, as geographically spread from Glasgow to Glastonbury and across to Belfast.

Deaf and disabled children and young people were supported to attend the residential, and around 30% of the group came from BME communities.

Methodology

At the event, children and young people were consulted on different issues on the second day of the residential. The DSCF were invited to consult with the groups through two different opportunities; the marketplace and the workshop.

Marketplace

10 different questions were posed to the groups as they were invited to attend the marketplace session over lunch. Incentives were offered to the group once they had completed the activity on each stand.

The questions posed at the DCSF stand were:
- What do you like about shopping?
- What don't you like about shopping?

Children and young people wrote their responses on a piece of paper and then posted their positive responses into a shopping basket and negative responses into a bin. All responses were then typed up.

Workshop

The full workshop toolkit is recorded in appendix one. The workshop focussed on the questions from the DCSF young people's consultation.

The Marketplace attracted a large number of children and young people to the stand to answer the questions.

We received 142 responses to 'I like shopping' and 90 responses to 'I don't like shopping'. The full responses are listed in Appendix Two.

Question One: What Young People Like about shopping:

The responses can be categorised into four areas:

1. Shopping items *(specific items or products)*

    • Mobiles, footballs and boots, trackies, trainers, clothes, shoes, and food.

    "Buying cool things"

2. Emotional Impact *(how shopping makes young people feel and what they enjoy about it)*

    • Fun, having everything I want, relaxing, entertaining, feeling good about yourself, build confidence, sociable, spoilt, spending time with friends, gossip, and treats.

    "Feeling good about yourself, new image, confidence."

3. Process of shopping *(the elements of the shopping experience that young people enjoy)*

    • Choice, getting new stuff, variety, easy to get there, reasonable price, spending money, meeting people, browsing, finding bargains and sales in the holidays.
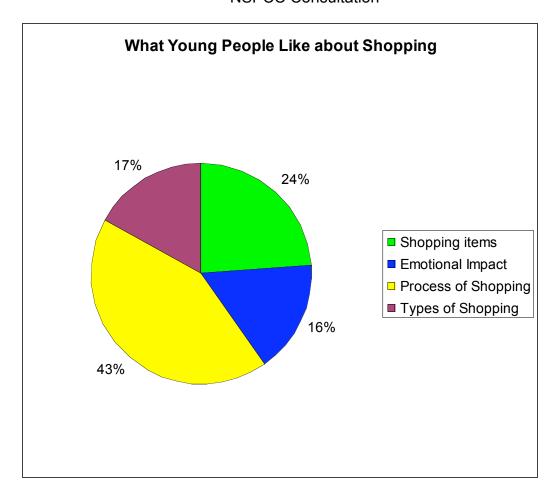
    "The climax after all those weeks of saving, spending it on something good."

4. Types of shopping *(including specific shops along with types of shopping)*

    • Clothes shops (Primark, Topshop, H&M), Food shops (Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury), bargain shopping, and sale shopping.

    "Really good deals, Primark."

The chart below shows the distribution of responses within these categories, with the most popular being the process of shopping followed by specific items or products.

What Young People Like about Shopping

Question Two: What Young People don't like about shopping:
The responses can be categorised into three areas:

1. Types of shopping *(specific items, products or shops)*

   - Markets, fake goods, grocery shopping, Asda, Tesco, shopping with family, shopping alone, shopping without friends, and refridgerated areas in supermarkets.

"Being made to go shopping"
"Shopping for things parent want to buy like furniture or DIY."
"Girls who shop for ages!"

2. Access to shopping *(including getting there, and ability to engage in shopping)*

   - Bus travel, cost, lack of choice, not having things in stock or in size, communication, quality, and inaccessible signs.
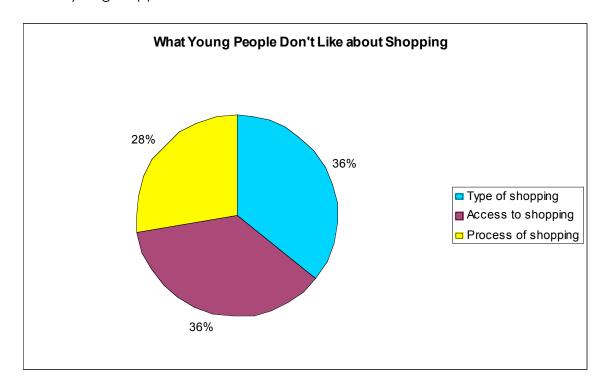
"Clothes shops never having my size so I felt left out of being able to buy things that my friends had or I liked."

*"Not being able to communicate with shop assistants as they don't allow me
to lip read."*
"Not being able to hang out in shopping areas."

3. Process of shopping *(the elements of the shopping experience that young people
    don't enjoy)*

    • Security guards following young people, queues, trolleys, shop
      assistants, prams, trolleys, clothing made through child labour,
      gangs, feeling vulnerable with goods and expense.

"I might get robbed of my stuff."
"Security guards following you just cos you are young."
"Pushy shop assistants."
"When you get ripped off."

What Young People Don't Like about Shopping

28%

36%

36%

☐ Type of shopping
☐ Access to shopping
☐ Process of shopping

The least popular categories were type of shopping and access to shopping, with access
receiving only one more comment than type. Food shopping was deemed the least
enjoyable receiving the most comments on type, and in access, queues was most
frequently mentioned.

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Workshop

14 young people aged 13 to 19 took part in the workshop session.

Session One: Access to advertising / branding / logos

This session looked at the ways that companies get their advertising messages across the young people, and how effective, relevant and intrusive young people felt those messages were.

Between the three groups of young people the list of places that young people see advertising messages were:

- Arcades
- Shoes
- Transport (tubes, buses)
- Sports sponsorship
- Billboards
- Leisure centres
- Mobile phones
- Football match
- Clothes
- Magazines
- Cinema
- TV
- Game consoles
- Planes
- DVD's
- Internet
- Deaf media
- News
- Papers
- Radio
- Videos
- Youth Clubs
- Music Festival
- Job Centres
- Post Offices
- Stadium
- Schools
- Posters
- Word of Mouth
- Social club
- Swimming pool
- Gym
- Product placement
- Shop windows

Using this list the groups were asked to rank the advertising mediums in order or
effectiveness, relevance to young people, and intrusiveness. Each group's
preference is listed in the tables below.

Effectiveness of Message

There is consistency across the three groups, with the Internet and TV as the most
effective means to get messages out to young people. Post, leaflets and Radio are
felt to be the least effective means and methods.

Group One	
Most Effective	Internet
	TV
	Buses
	Word of Mouth
	Cinema
	Taxis
	Leaflets in game boxes
	Radio
	Telephone Boxes
Least Effective	Leaflets

When thinking about the effectiveness of 'word of mouth', which this group placed
very highly, they discussed that in order for that to happen there needs to be some
convincing of the original person by advertisers in the first place, and that would most
likely be through the more effective means they have already listed (namely the
Internet, TV and Buses).

Group Two	
Most Effective	TV
	Internet
	Clothing
	Schools
	Newspapers
	Magazines
	Word of mouth
	Billboards posters
	Stadium
	Job centre ads
	Radio
	Shops
	Transport
	Leaflets
Least Effective	Post

On adverts on transport, some young people talked about how often the adverts are
quite 'cheesy messages', but when you are on public transport and trying to avoid
looking at people you often end up reading the adverts. This was particularly talked
about by young people who travel on the tube in London as the frequency in which
they view messages is high.

Clothing appears as very effective as the group felt that young people have chosen to wear it therefore have 'bought into' the message that it gives.

Group Three	
Most Effective	Internet
	Transport (Buses, Trains)
	Newspaper
Least Effective	Radio

The internet remains the most highly placed effective means to advertise to young people. Some of the groups also talked about how they now access more TV and Radio through the internet and how advertising is something you 'sign up to' when you access the internet. They expect rather than challenge advertising on the internet feeling it is an implicit part of internet service.

Relevance of Message Medium to Young People

Similar to the effectiveness of the message, Internet is the top choices for the groups. TV comes in next with Buses / Transport also being important. Youth clubs, newspapers and Job Centres are felt to be the least relevant places to advertise to young people.

Group One	
Most Relevant	Internet
	Television
	Billboards
	Transport (Buses / trains)
	Newspapers and Magazines
Least Relevant	Youth Clubs

The group discussed how the internet is more likely to advertise something that is directly relevant to the page which is being looked at. The group talked about 'Google' adverts and how all the pages are linked through the theme you are looking at. They did also discuss though how inappropriate advertising can also happen when you are looking at one site and a pop up for something different appears.

None of the young people who attended this group had accessed their local youth club or had any plans to. They also felt this was the least relevant place to advertise to young people as you would not want to access products whilst you were there. When prompted to think about whether services or advice would be good to have in a Youth Club the group felt that would be very appropriate and welcome.

Group Two	
Most Relevant	Internet
	Buses
	Word of mouth
	Magazines
	Leaflets
	Radio
Least Relevant	Newspapers

Newspaper has scored consistently low in all the groups as they felt that young
people do not access this medium. Young people who use public transport also
talked about the nuisance of the free newspapers that circulate the tube and buses.
One young person said *"I pick them up when I am bored, but I don't look at the
adverts, its all houses and not stuff for young people."*

Group Three	
Most Relevant	Internet
	TV
	Clothing
	Radio
	Schools
	Word of Mouth
	Magazines
	Billboards
	Shops
	Stadiums
	Newspapers
	Transport
	Leaflets
	Post
Least Relevant	Job Centres

The direct mail approach was felt by this group to not be relevant as it just comes
through door and gets ignored, and does not relate to them, they feel this is an
approach that targets parents and carers.

Shops appears around the mid table area, and the group talked about the need for
different shops to take different approaches. For some shops (particularly those
brands that young people readily identify with) may not need to advertise in other
mediums; a high street presence is enough for them. But the group felt that some
shops would need to have clear messages in different mediums to persuade you to
visit them in the first place. For either type of shop though the young people felt it
was important that once in the shop there should be adverts inside the shop offering
discounts and incentives for purchasing.

Intrusiveness of Messages

This final ranking category split the groups thinking from each other, with no
agreement on either the most or least intrusive between any of the groups. The most
intrusive were felt to be the internet, post (direct mail) and Radio. The least intrusive
were felt to be Clothing, Post Office and Transport.

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Group One	
Most Intrusive	Internet
	Transport (Tubes, Buses)
Least Intrusive	Clothes

Internet adverts were the source of heated debate in this group (hence why they only chose three categories). The group felt that some are intrusive, such as pop-ups, while others such as banners are less intrusive.

Clothing was felt to be the least intrusive as you don't have to look, and they felt that the majority of young people choose to wear branded clothing on a daily basis.

Group Two	
Most Intrusive	Post (mail)
	Leaflets
	Schools
	Word of mouth
	Radio
	TV
	Internet adverts
	Transport
	Shops
	Newspapers
	Stadium
	Magazines
	Clothing
	Billboards
	Posters
Least Intrusive	Post Offices

This group chose post (direct mail) as the most intrusive as they felt that as lots of it just comes through your door, and felt that there is nothing you can do about it.

Group Three	
Most Intrusive	Radio
	Leaflets
	Pamphlets
	TV (interrupting programs
	Internet pop ups
	Product placement
	Posters
	Shop windows
	Buses
	Cinemas
	Newspapers
	Word of mouth
	Telephone boxes
	Magazines
	Video's / DVD's
	Pamphlets / leaflets

Least Intrusive	Social club / swimming pool / gym
	Buses and trains

The group rationalised that Radio was the most intrusive and Buses / trains least intrusive, because of the element of choice. Most of the young people listened to commercial radio stations and the number of adverts on the radio was felt to be excessive. On transport although the number of adverts is also excessive you have the choice to ignore them and it does not have a detrimental effect on your travelling experience. They were clear that the number of adverts on the radio does affect your listening experience, although all of this group said it still would not change their choice of radio station, they accept that commercialism is the price of free radio stations.

Session Two: Power and Influence

The three groups were each given a product to 'sell' to the rest of the groups, using the discussions they had about the most effective, intrusive and relevant way to get messages to young people.

Group One – Ipod

The group felt that clothing is the least intrusive way to advertise to young people, everyone wears it and can choose to buy it. They chose to take the Ipod product and design an Ipod T-shirt.

The T-shirt included:
- A pocket for Ipod
- Power on / off button is the apple logo in the centre
- It glows in the dark
- Has a power battery display
- Has controls for the Ipod on the shirt
- Retail price of £20

When opened out to the wider group to discuss, they felt that this was a positive idea, and most of the young people were persuaded to buy.

In discussion, the other young people raised issue of 'risk of theft' and 'target to mugging' by wearing the T-shirt. They felt that the Apple brand would increase the target of the person wearing as it would be known they had an Ipod to steal. Branded technology items such as Ipods, MP3's and mobile phones were felt by the young people to increase their vulnerability to muggings and theft. However, all of the group possessed items in these categories and would still purchase branded goods related to them, despite the fear of crime.

The group particularly liked the idea that the T-Shirt could be given as an incentive or free when you buy an Ipod. They felt that this is particularly appealing to young people as a marketing message and that young people are more likely to buy products when incentives are offered.

Group Two – Trainers

The group chose to sell the idea that you can construct and build your own bespoke trainers on line. A pop up would appear on certain social networking sites, inviting you to design your own trainers for free. Once you have done so, you are then given a unique reference number to take to the official site of the manufacturer (K-Swiss in

this case) who would then make the trainers, post them to you or collect in store. The price of the trainers would depend on how complicated the design was.

When opened out to the wider group to discuss they felt there were lots of positive aspects to the idea; uniqueness of product, individuality, and saving time on shopping were all mentioned.

The presenting group felt that using the internet was the most effective way to market a product clearly designed for young people. Marketing it in young people spaces was the most effective way in their eyes to getting young people to buy the product. They recognized though that some young people find this very intrusive, especially pop ups and being redirected to other websites.

The whole group discussed the difference between 'friendly' or 'unfriendly' pop ups, with the former being welcomed and the latter referring to ones that are inappropriate, for example pornography. A 'friendly' pop up should be one that makes you intrigued and curious to find out more about the product / service / advice, but not make you feel intimidated, worried or feel that you shouldn't be looking at the information.

One group member felt that using a pop up could mean you get carried away with playing on it, and not actually get around to looking into the cost of the product itself which may end up with young people having their expectation raised, desire the product and then not be able to afford to purchase. This young person felt it could be a very negative experience for some young people who do not have access to disposable income.

Group Three – Mobile Phone

The group presented a TV ad centred on a young man on the bus whose phone is not working. Frustrated he looks up and sees an advert for a great mobile phone deal on the bus. He then goes to the shop to buy his mobile phone; the deal exists and is as good as advertised! He is also given discount on an Ipod T-shirt and money donated to Childline! The group chose to focus on two marketing mediums; TV and transport feeling these are the most effective way of getting the message across to young people. It would be a short lived campaign as they felt this would add extra appeal and demand.

The phone deal included:
- 7.0 mega pixel camera
- Watch TV for free
- Touch screen
- Radio
- Free video messaging
- Brilliant connection, every time and anywhere
- Free internet
- 1 pence per minute calls
- 5 pence per text
- MP3
- 40 GB memory
- Only £99

In the group discussion, all of the young people were influenced to buy the product, although in reality they wondered how a company would be able to offer such a good deal!
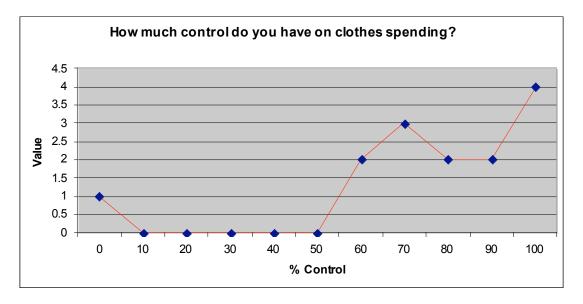
One of the major influencing factors was the 'honesty' about the deal. The fact that the young man saw the advert, then the shop delivered on all the promises without hidden catches was very appealing to young people. They talked about how often companies promise great deals, and when it comes to accessing them, the hidden catches make the process disappointing.

The whole group agreed that transport is a very effective medium for marketing to young people; you can choose to look at the adverts, and it actually gives you something else to focus on when you are travelling.
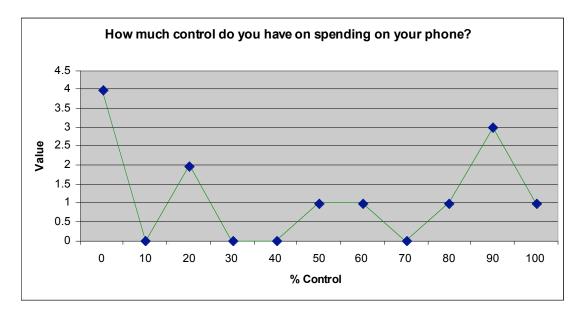
Session Three: Power and Control

The group was asked to rank where they think they had power and control over spending on clothes, entertainment, phone and Internet.

The majority of the group felt they had between 60 to 100% control of what they spent on clothes. Only one young person felt they had no control on spending. These results are unsurprising given that a significant number of the group were around 18 years old, with two of them at University and 2 working full time.

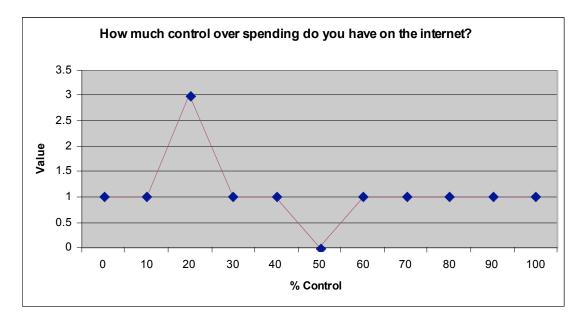**How much control do you have on clothes spending?**

This next chart shows a much more uneven distribution with young people reporting much less control over spending on their phone. More than half of the young people have less than 50% control on spending on their phone, whereas all but one of the young people have more than 50% control spending on clothes. This reflects the feedback from young people that parents and carers are largely paying their mobile phone bills and therefore have control on usage.

How much control do you have on spending on your phone?

In discussion with a couple of the group, they did comment that for a phone in the house, shared with other family members, they would have no control over spending at all.
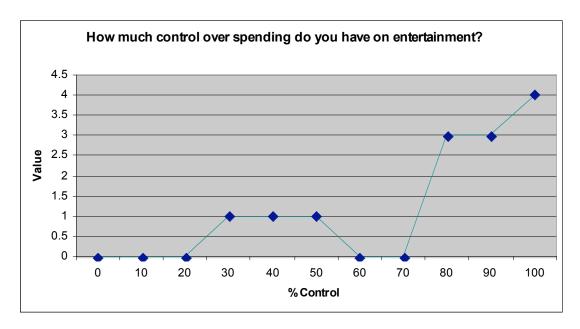
This next chart again shows an uneven distribution of control, with again more than half of the group feeling they have less than 50% control on spending on the internet. In discussion with some of the young people they said that if the question was about control of 'time' spent on the internet (and not money spent); most of them felt that they had almost total control of the time they could spend on the internet.

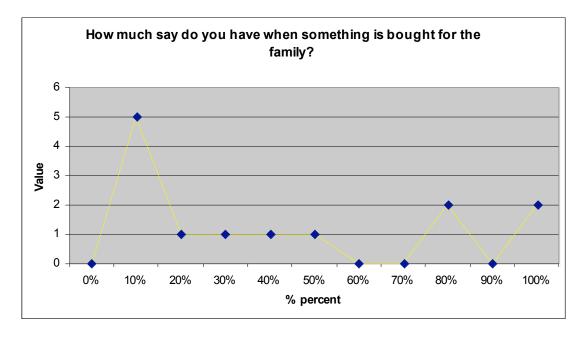**How much control over spending do you have on the internet?**

All but one of the young people had access to the internet at home, via a broadband connection. Although more than half of them felt they had less than 50% control on what was spent, this was largely due to parents and carers paying the internet bills and that these are now largely a flat fee for the month.

The next chart shows the distribution of control on spending on entertainment. Similar to the chart on clothing, the majority of the young people feel they have a greater degree of control on their entertainment choices. In discussion with some

members they reasoned that this was either because parents / carers gave them allowances, or that they earn their own money. In both cases, this gives them a greater freedom to choose.

How much control over spending do you have on entertainment?

The previous four charts all reflect young people's position in the family and their choices to consume based on income made available to them. The next chart shows how young people feel they have a choice in the decisions made that impact on the whole family.

How much say do you have when something is bought for the family?

Only four of the young people feel that they have more than 50% say in family decisions. These young people are the over 18 year olds who are living away from home, at University or in employment. The majority of the group feel they have a marginal say in family made decisions about joint resources or items.

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Do you think your friends have more influence over what you buy than your parents / carers do?

The young people were asked to write their responses to this question on flipchart paper.

- Yes and no my mum knows what I like. But obviously my friends and I wear similar brands, clothes etc
- Depends on what it is
- No I buy whatever I want
- No, my friends aren't anymore fashionable
- No
- Yes and no, because it depends on my opinion
- Yes much more
- Depends on what parents buy for me
- In a way, what do they think is good / bad but parents don't mind what I buy as long as it's not too expensive or offensive
- I don't mind what my friends think of it, I just think - do **I** like it?

Why do Children and Young People ask their parents to buy things?

The young people were asked to write their responses to this question on flipchart paper.

- If they don't have the money
- If they don't have control over their money
- They don't have money
- Under 16's cant work
- Because they aren't in jobs
- Because they are broke (x 2)
- Been influenced by the media
- Sometimes its attention seeking
- They don't have enuf money themselves
- Because they usually earn much more money
- Because they haven't got money (x 2)
- To see if they steal them

When do children and young people ask their parents to buy them things?

The young people were asked to write their responses to this question on flipchart paper.

- When its expensive or for a good cause
- If its expensive
- If it requires a lot of decision making and its expensive
- Peer pressure
- Media / friend have stuff
- Under 16's can't work!
- All da time
- Birthday (x 4)
- Christmas (x 4)
- When they're broke (x 4)

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Appendices

Appendix One: Workshop Toolkit

Question for the workshop:
The consultation questions on the young people's call for evidence have been used to inform the session. The session will be split into three themes:

- Access to advertising/branding/logos
- Power of Influence
- Power and control

Method
Agenda for the session:

Time	Item
10 mins	Introduction & Icebreakers
15 mins	Access to Advertising
45 mins	Power of Influence
15 mins	Break
25 mins	Power and Control
5 mins	Evaluation

Access to advertising/branding/logos
This session will pick up on these consultation questions:
- *Apart from adverts in magazines and on television are there any other ways companies get in touch with you?*
- *Are you worried about the number of promotional ideas and adverts you see or that get sent to you?*

We will ask the young people to start by identifying all the places that they see advertising, branding, logo's commercial messages. There will be some pre-prepared pictures (billboards, internet, phone, TV, radio, magazines etc) and also some cards to write their responses. Once we have a full list the group is split into two.

The groups will be asked to complete three tasks:
- Rank the places you see messages from most effective to least effective
- Rank the places you see messages from most intrusive to least intrusive. On the day we will use language such as 'butting in'
- Rank the places you see messages from most relevant to young people to least relevant to young people

Power of influence
This session will pick up on these consultation questions:
- *In your opinion what is good and bad about these other kinds of marketing and promotion*
- *What do you think is bad about the advertising you see*
- *What do you think is good about the advertising you see*

We will split the group into 3 groups, and each group has the same task. Using 3 different products (e.g. mobile phone, IPod and sports trainers), the young people have to construct an example of an appealing advert to young people, and they then

have to sell it to the group. They can choose a choice of medium, but should be influenced by the ranking exercise in the first section.

Once they have constructed and sold the product to the group we will capture through group discussion what is good / bad about the approach they took. The types of questions we will use to prompt discussion will include:

- Good / bad points about the advert
- Style of advert
- Appeal to young people
- Whether you are influenced to buy
- How you are influenced to buy
- Language / tone / imagery of the advert

Power and control
This session will pick up on these consultation questions:
- *Do your parents or carers let you spend money on what you want*
- *Have you ever asked your parents or carers for things that they would not normally buy because you felt pressure to do so*

Coming back into one group, young people will be asked to place stickers on flipcharts around the walls. The flipcharts will have these questions:

1. How much control over your spending do you have? 4 flipcharts covering phone / internet / clothes / entertainment with a line with parents 100% control at one end, and I have 100% control at the other end. Young people place stickers where they feel they have that control.
2. When the family buys something for everyone to use how much say do you have in what is bought? A flipchart with a line from 'no say 'at one end to 'full involvement' at the other and they place stickers on the line

The final task is then to look at the pressure to buy. Splitting the group into three, we will use a 'speed dating' process where they rotate quickly giving their opinions on three questions to staff:

1. When do children and young people ask their parents to buy them things?
2. Why do children and young people ask their parents to buy them things?
3. Do you think your friends have more influence over what you buy than advertisers do?

Appendix Two: Marketplace data

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What I like about Shopping

- Buying PS3 games
- Designer clothes
- So many options Fashion!!
- Trackies
- Mobiles
- Primark
- H&M
- Topshop
- Cheap stuff!!
- Getting sport stuff
- I like buying clothes
- Bargains
- Going out with friends
- When stuff is affordable
- Food
- You sometimes get good deals
- I like the range of shoes & clothes
- Lots of choice
- After you buy the stuff you get to eat them (if it is food that is)
- I love all the gorgeous clothes
- Variety of choice
- Fair trade
- Cheap Asda, smart choice
- Cadburys
- Galaxy
- Getting new stuff
- There's a lot of things to get and fun
- Looking at new types of stuff
- Pizzas
- Footballs
- Feeling good about yourself, new image, confidence
- Football boots
- Trainers
- New items
- Carrying lots of bags
- Designer logos
- Having everything I want
- Buying new stuff
- Relaxing
- Entertaining
- Do what you want when you want
- Variety
- New items
- I like buying things
- New stuff

- Finding stuff that looks good
- Feeling good about yourself
- Getting cheap deals
- Build confidence, trying on new clothes
- Money
- Spoilt
- Sociable
- Easy to get there
- You get to spend money & it's quite relaxing, when you do not get what you want it's stressful!!
- Shopping for food & clothes
- I get to spend money
- Sainsbury's good quality food!
- I like looking through clothes and spending loots of money
- Everything
- Really good deals, Primark
- When you go shopping you get to buy things that you like or you are interested in
- I like shopping because you can buy stuff that you want
- Spending time with my Dad
- Going & buying new clothes
- Browsing & having fun in dressing rooms with friends
- Getting stuff
- I like clothes shopping
- I like shopping because you get money spent on you sometimes
- I like gems shop
- I like it when I get things for me!!
- Nice clothes cheap
- Seeing friends
- Do like getting things that I've bought
- Getting latest fashion
- New things
- Getting nice clothes
- Like getting new clothes
- Having a laugh with mates
- The organisation
- Looking at clothes & new stuff
- Bargains

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- Getting nice trend setter clothes
- Love the clothes that I wear
- Some are cheap stuff so children can buy it
- Some shopping mall is big
- Food shopping!!
- I like buying my own things, but don't like expense
- Choosing things with your friends
- I like shopping because it is fun when you have money
- Excuse to meet & catch up with friends
- Buying new things
- Meeting new people
- Having MONEY!! Spending
- Buying things
- When I have money Sales!!
- Best of buying things I like
- I like being able to spend time with my friends and have a good gossip
- Sparkly neon signs
- Getting things I want
- Try before you buy
- Choice of having more to shop
- Prices of things not too bad
- Range of options
- Get stuff
- Good day out
- Bargains
- New wardrobe
- I like clothes
- Silly string
- Food
- Bus
- Browsing
- Get new stuff
- Sweets
- Company
- Treats
- Clothes
- Shops have a lot of choice
- Exciting
- I like looking for new things
- That there are sales at holidays
- A social time with my friends
- Buying clothes
- Spending money
- Finding bargains
- The climax after all those weeks of saving, spending it on something good
- Cash
- Spending
- Clothes
- Shoes
- Spending money buying goods
- Spending money
- Clothes
- New clothes
- Buying cool things
- Nice stuff
- Getting stuff that I like
- Getting shiny new things
- I like buying nice new clothes
- Sales

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What I don't like about Shopping

- Long queues
- Don't like the way the security guards follow you
- Don't like Markets
- Cheap goods
- Fake designer goods
- Queues!
- The cold bits in supermarkets
- Security guards following you just cos you're young
- Getting there on the bus
- Queues
- Food shopping
- No choice
- Queues
- Buses
- Finding parking
- When I cant afford anything and my friends are buying loads
- No choice
- Cheap goods
- Trolleys
- Queues
- Snotty shop assistants
- Girls out shopping! Annoying!
- Asda
- Cost
- Too expensive
- Queues
- Signs on shops saying no more than 3 teenagers in at a time
- No choice
- Markets
- Tesco
- Shop assistants who think you're going to rob them
- Shabby places to shop
- Having no money
- When you don't know where the stuff was made
- Getting there. Buses!
- Asda
- Not enough to choose from
- Trolleys
- Prams bumping into you
- Security guards
- I might get robbed of my stuff
- Food shopping is boring
- Not having something in my size
- Shopping with my mum
- Price
- When clothes are made by children
- Shopping on my own
- When I cant find what I really want
- Not getting there easily
- I don't like any shopping
- Getting stressed
- Shops that don't give student discount
- Queues
- Waiting for ages
- Not having clothes in my size
- Small places to shop with no choice
- Pushy shop assistants
- Mother's with buggy's
- Clothes shops never having my size so I felt left out of being able to buy things that my friends had or I liked
- Gangs outside shops
- Going into shops when you are the only one in there
- Queues
- Not being able to communicate with the shop assistants as they don't allow me to lip read
- Shop assistants following you around the shop
- Security guards following you just because you are young
- Not being able to hang out in a shopping area
- Prices are too high
- Shopping with family
- Being made to go shopping
- Shopping for things that parents want to buy like furniture or DIY shopping
- Can't trust quality
- Tesco/Asda, food cheap quality poor
- Food shopping
- Signs not easy to read
- Fridges in supermarkets
- Queues
- Not having enough money
- Not friendly to young people
- Queues
- Having to hunt for what you want in sales
- When I have to go with family
- When my friends don't come

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- When its not fun
- Queues
- When you get ripped off
- Fake goods
- No batteries in toys!
- Boring shopping
- Girls who shop for ages
- Queues

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THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH BOARD'S VIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE IMPACT OF THE COMMERCIAL WORLD ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

On Saturday 13th September 2008, members of the Children and Youth Board discussed the impact of the commercial world on children and young people today. They focused at three different aspects:

- The effectiveness, intrusiveness and relevance of different types of advertising for children and young people
- What makes an effective advertisement and attractive product for children and young people
- The amount of control they have on spending in different aspects of their lives

Activity One: Ranking different types of advertising to show (a) how effective Board members think they are (b) how intrusive they think they are and (c) how relevant they think they are to children and young people

- The facilitator led a five minute brainstorming session on all the possible ways that companies advertise and brand products.
- After the brainstorm, the list was whittled down to 12 advertising/branding methods.
- The Children and Youth Board spilt into four smaller working groups and ranked the same 12 advertising/branding methods according to the categories above.

Activity Two: Making an advertisement for a product for children and young people

- The Children and Youth Board remained in the same smaller working groups and were tasked with coming up with an advertisement for a product of their choice. They were asked to think about the first exercise to create an advert that would have maximum appeal for children and young people.
- The groups were asked to make a 'product portfolio' sheet which contained vital information about the product and the advert.
- The groups were then asked to present their advertisement and product portfolio' to the other groups
- After all the groups had presented their advertisements, all the Children and Youth Board members were given a 'cheque.' They were asked to place the cheque on the product portfolio of the advert/product that they thought was the most appealing to children and young people. They were instructed to write the reasons for their choice on the back of the cheque.

Activity Three: Measuring the amount of control children and young people have over their spending.

- All Children and Youth Board members were given a slip of paper that asked five questions about how much control they have – on a scale of one to ten – over their spending on different things.

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2. FINDINGS

Activity One: The rankings from the four separate groups were given a numeric value to produce an overall ranking from the whole Children and Youth Board

Effectiveness:
Order of 'effectiveness,' beginning with the most effective

1. TV
2. Peers
3. Magazines/Newspapers
4. Shop Windows
5. Billboards
6. Transport
6. Sponsorship
8. Posters
9. Radio
10. Internet pop ups
11. Receipts
12. Cold Calling

Discussion:
- The majority of the board Members immediately said the **TV** was the most effective. However, they agreed that **peers** were important too because if they are talking about something, you want to know about it. One group agreed that **peers** were the most effective. The other three groups said **TV** was the most effective.
- *"**Shop windows** make things look really good."*
- *"I notice **brands**, I like them because everyone knows the name and knows you've spent a lot of money."*
- **Sponsorship** was heavily linked with football.
- **Catalogues** were effective because you look at them without the intention to buy anything and then you either order something or go to the place/shop, which you wouldn't have normally gone to.
- They said **Internet** was less effective, if they get pop ups they just turn them off.
- They said **billboards/posters** are effective because everyone sees them; lighting is used to make them even more effective.
- They said using **transport** for advertising – such as adverts on buses or at bus stops – is quite effective because you see it everywhere.
- **Radio** was considered less effective because it is not so visual – e.g. you can't 'see' a new Topshop top.
- Someone did not know what '**cold calling**' was.

Intrusiveness:

Assessing the Imapct of the commercial wolrd on children's Wellbeing – Children and Young People's Board

Order of 'intrusiveness,' beginning with the most intrusive

1. Cold Calling
2. Internet pop ups
3. Peers
3. Radio
5. TV
6. Billboards
7. Transport
8. Shop Windows
9. News/Magazines
10. Receipts
11. Posters
11. Sponsorship

Discussion:
- *"Is **TV** intrusive because it is just kind of there?"*
- *"**Radio** is quite intrusive because the adverts are really loud"*
- *"**Radio** adverts are annoying because they cut into the music."*
- ***"TV** adverts can be fun but also annoying when you are enjoying a **TV** programme. You have to watch all the adverts breaks to get to the end of the programme."*
- ***"TV** adverts breaks are handy if you need the toilet."*
- They agreed that they were more likely to accept adverts on **TV** than those on **radio** because the latter give them "*nothing to do*" during the interruption.
- They thought **Internet** pop ups were really intrusive because you try to close them but then they open up again
- **Billboards** don't butt in.
- **Shop windows** are in the way and the product is easily accessible but **billboards** sometimes blend in to the scenery and the product may not be easily accessible. *"**Shop windows** are right there, it's easy to get to the shop because it is just there. **Billboards** are not always near the shop."*
- **Peers** – There was some disagreement in one group around how intrusive they thought peers could be. Some young people said that peers telling you what to wear, do or buy was just a "part of life", but some said it was a real "problem," because they feel under pressure to conform.

Relevant to young people:
Order of how relevant the Children and Youth Board members thought the different types of advertising were:

1. Peers
2. TV
2. Newspapers/Magazines
4. Sponsorship
5. Shop Windows
6. Internet pop ups
7. Transport
7. Billboards
9. Posters on buildings
10. Radio
11. Receipts
12. Cold Calling

The Children and Youth Board did not make a lot of discussion whilst ranking the categories for the third time due to limited time for the activity.

Activity Two*: *The results are set out advert-by-advert beginning with the most popular to the least popular. The most popular advert was awarded the most cheques.

Advert One: *The Golden Pass*

Product:
A card pass that gives young people aged 11-18 access to public transport, swimming and social activities for £5 a term.

Advertising Medium:
Various, to reach lots of different young people. Media included: TV (to reach the most young people), and advertising in schools (speaking in assemblies and posters).

Brief Description of the Advert:
The TV advert showed lots of young people taking part in all the activities that the 'golden pass' offers, in a comical way. It had a cheesy, memorable jingle and voice over telling the young people what it cost and what was on offer to them.

12 Board Members (55%) chose to 'buy,' this product, their reasons were:

Product:

'It is a product that has a purpose, I would use it,'

Because most young people always go out using public transport, and also are always doing leisure activities,'

It is different and appealing to young people,'

'I would get it because I'd get into the swimming pool free,'

'The benefits are important, it is expensive to travel and it's stupid how people in education have to pay for travel,'

It is more important item for me than a bracelet [another product advertised] *because leisure and transport is very expensive for me.'*

Advert:

It has a catchy song and it was funny, even though it still gave you the details,'

The advert was simple and showed young people benefiting from it,'

The advert was funny,'

'TV is the best way to advertise, I watch TV and I don't buy the same things as my friend, so peer pressure isn't good,'

'I think the non-intrusive poster advertising would subliminally influence me and slip into my subconscious.'

Other:

'The company and your peers would not try and pressure you to buy it, the products that are sold by peer pressure discourage me because I don't follow fashions or depend on them,'

'I would buy it but the only problem is that I am too young – I am 10.'

'I don't think the use of celebrity/peer pressure would influence me,'

[Comments about peer pressure or celebrity endorsement refer to approaches used in the other adverts.]

Advert Two: *Prada Diamond*

Product:
A designer mobile phone that comes with a free handbag.

Advertising Medium:
Television Advert

Product Specification:
The phone would cost under £80, "cheaper than an iphone." It would have a camera, large screen, fantastic games and loads of memory. It is described as 'the perfect gift.'

Brief Description of the Advert:
It showed a catwalk model walking down the catwalk with the Prada handbag (free with the phone) in her hand; lots of photographers were taking photos of the model. When the model reached the end of the catwalk one of the photographers flipped over his camera to reveal that it was actually a phone, the Prada phone. The photographers then slipped the phone into the model's bag in a pocket on the front of the bag that had been specially designed for the phone. There was a voice over telling you the specification and price of the product whilst this happened.

Advertising Details:
The adverts would be shown weekdays 3.30-5pm when children and young people get home from school and around 6pm at weekends in between *X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent.*

6 Board Members (27%) chose to 'buy,' this product, their main reasons were:

Product:

'Use of Designer Brands, the designer label makes you want it'

'Free Gift (handbag),

'the way the pricing is modelled at £79.79 (under £80), makes you feel that it is very cheap'

'It is a nice looking product,'

Advert:

'Good TV Marketing'

'The TV advert was great'

'When it was advertised it looked great'

'It was sold really well, the timing of the advert makes sure that you see it'

'The advertisement showed how you can get all the attention if you have this product'

Other:

'Everyone has a phone, so may as well have a really cool one,'

'It was advertised in an eye catching way because the catwalk and fashion are popular at the moment, what you see on the catwalk you get!'

Advert Three: *Friendship Bling*

Product:
A fashionable friendship bracelet

Advertising Medium:
No formal advertising. It will be promoted through peers.

Advertising Details:
Comments on packaging :'if you don't have it you're not worth it,' and 'Bling Bracelets bring buddies begging to be beside you.'

Brief description of Advert:
The group acted out how the bracelet would be promoted through peers. They showed a group of young people who all had the 'friendship bling' bracelets on reject a boy who did not have a bracelet. So he went home and asked his mum if she could get him one. His mum bought him a cheaper version of the bracelet and when he went back to see his 'friends,' they noticed it wasn't the same and still rejected him. He then got his mum to buy the correct one, despite it being much more expensive and when he went back to see his friends they finally accepted him into the group.

4 Board Members (18%) chose to 'buy,' this product their reasons were:

'The advert message was great because it showed that you needed to have a 'friendship bling' bracelet to fit in with a particular group'

'It was the most effective product because peer pressure affects children the most because they can be left out if they don't have the product'

'It's not advertised on TV and posters etc, but I feel if there was peer pressure on buying something to fit in then I think it would make me buy it.'

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Advert Four: *Band-It*

> **Product**: A shopping company that allows you to customise clothing, in particular friendship bracelets to copy celebrity style.
>
> **Advertising Medium**: Posters, Shop Windows, Sponsorship and Television Adverts
>
> **Advertising Details**: The group did not demonstrate a TV Advert, they held up a poster advertising 'Band-It,' and explained that the two figures featured on it were celebrities, Katie Price and Peter Andre, wearing customised friendship bracelets. The slogan on the poster was 'You design it! You wear it!'

No board members chose to 'buy,' this product.

Activity Three: **The Children and Youth Board askedabout the levels of control they have over their spending on different things using a scale of 1 to 10. The results on average for the whole group were:**

Most Control: Entertainment/Family Purchase (Equal score: 7.7)
                    Mobile (Score: 7.6)
                    Internet (Score: 7)
Least Control: Clothes (Score: 6.9)

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3. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- The Children and Youth Board thought TV was the most effective form of advertising followed closely but peers. They thought cold calling was the least effective.

- The Children and Youth Board thought 'cold calling,' was the most intrusive form of advertising followed closely by internet pop ups. They thought posters and sponsorship were the least intrusive.

- The Children and Youth Board thought that 'peers,' were the most relevant form of advertising to children and young people followed by TV and newspapers/magazines. They thought 'cold calling,' was the least relevant.

- 'Peers,' were within the top three in all ranking exercises for 'effectiveness,' 'intrusiveness,' and 'relevance to young people.'

- When performing their products/adverts to the whole groups, 82% of the Children and Youth Board Members chose to 'buy,' a product that was sold via a TV advert. This supports their opinion that TV is the most effective form of advertising.

- Two groups sold very similar products (friendship bracelets) in two different ways, the group who produced 'Friendship Bling,' (advert 3) showed the product being sold through peer pressure and the groups who produced 'Band-It,' (advert 4) showed the product being sold via posters. 18% of the

Children and Youth Board chose to 'buy,' 'Friendship Bling,' and no members of the Children and Youth Board chose to 'buy,' 'Band-It.' This supports the evidence from the ranking exercise in which the Board said that peers were a more effective and relevant advertising medium for children and young people than posters.

• The Children and Youth Board members felt that they have most control over spending on their own entertainment and any purchases that are made for the family. They felt that they had the least control over spending on their clothes.

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Summary of focus group discussions with young people

1.	DCSF Officials held a series of 1 hour focus group discussions with a total of 40 young people aged13-19 during October/November 2008. The groups of young people involved in these discussions can not be considered to be representative. But the young people involved did come from diverse backgrounds, including: some who are carers; some who have experienced mental health problems; and some who are excluded from mainstream education.

2.	These discussions were held as part of existing programmes for young people funded by Media Box. We are grateful to the young people for the energy they showed during discussions and for the Media Box projects that made the time available.

What is the commercial world?

3.	All groups wanted to know what the definition of the commercial world was. This led to some far reaching discussions within the groups. For the young people involved in the discussions the following were seen as commercial: Adverts; 'only some' music; videos; shopping; art; posters; celebrities; magazines; TV; newspapers; and some aspects of education - *'…..well that's everything'.*

All young people felt that the commercial world was all around them, and a normal part of their lives.

Advertising

4.	Young people explained that they encounter commercial messages regularly – on public transport, in the street, in books, on TV, on the internet, in magazines, on clothing, and in schools.

5.	There were some discussions about the intrusive nature of advertising, as it can happen when they didn't want it to, but young people felt this interruption could make it more effective.

6.	The young people were very aware of the intent behind commercial messages. But they did not see themselves as particularly vulnerable to the messages. There was recognition that adverts have the ability to build up a desire to want things you might not need – but ….. *'the same could be said of my parents'.*

7.	All groups reported that commercial messages/advertising were not the most important influence on whether or not they would buy things. The other influencing factors included peers, family, uniqueness of product, risk of theft, cost and incentives. Peers and family were seen as the most important of all these factors.

8.	The young people did not distinguish between adverts for commercial products or those for charitable giving and social marketing campaigns. The

first two were coupled together as they were seen as been *'after your money'*. Whereas social marketing was seen as adverts designed to change your behaviour, but still adverts.

9.   The young people in the focus groups did indicate that they could get enjoyment from adverts themselves, in the same way as programming. Some adverts are seen as very slick, having filmic qualities - making some adverts into mini stand alone programmes.

10.   Some young people expressed how adverts allowed them to be creative, for example they have put their own music to the Drumming Gorilla and uploaded their efforts for the enjoyment of others on 'YouTube'. Other campaigns were cited as funny/witty such as the condom advert 'getting your gloves on' – but the young people did get the message.

11.   Adverts were seen as a source of information by young people considering a specific purpose. But young people were very clear that they would not take information from an advert on face value they would discuss what they had learnt with friends and family before acting on the information.

12.   Some adverts were seen as distressing: the NSPCC stop child cruelty campaign and 'Kill your Speed' campaign. It was felt that the imagery in these messages were too graphic. Not only did the young people themselves feel distressed but there were real concerns of the impact these adverts would have on younger children. However, all agreed that these are important messages to get across, and understood the rationale for making the imagery shocking.

13.   Some commercial/social messages can be a good thing and get young people consider other issues. For example the drink aware campaign can make people realise how stupid they look when drunk. The Oxfam campaign, highlighting poverty, was also singled out. It was considered thought provoking and had the power to pull on the heart strings. For the young people, in our sample, it made them think beyond their own horizons. And some realised that others are worse-off than themselves.

Brands

14.   Young people recognised they could be 'brand junkies', and for them the brands they associate themselves with are important. The wearing of branded clothing is seen as an outward projection of their values and aspirations -creating a sense of identity and at the same time allowing them to project their identity to others.

15.   Brands were also cited as giving some reassurance, for example they knew what they were getting when they bought a pair of branded trainers and that they are not going to fall apart and will last. Yet with unbranded goods young people could not be sure of what they were getting, and could be ripped off. This was very important to young people as they all had limited funds.

16. Although enjoying brands there was a recognition that brands could have a negative aspect to them and there is a risk that '*………you're also judged by brands you buy'*

Young people were concerned about this and all indicated they tried not to judge their peers by the brands they could afford.

17. The groups were also very clear that if they felt they had been 'ripped off' by a brand then they would make it know to their peer group, whether that be by word of mouth or over the internet. Young people enjoyed having the 'power' to do this.

Shopping

18. For the young people in our groups shopping was seen as a sociable activity. It was not just about buying things, but more importantly it was about meeting up with friends to gossip and catch-up. Some in the groups explained how much fun it is going in to shops without the intention of buying anything just to try things on – *'a bit like dressing up'*.

19. Large shopping centres were seen as safe places to go, as other people are around and young people felt less likely to be victims of petty crime when in a shopping centre as opposed to high streets. However, they did feel that security guards singled them out for special attention by following them around shopping centres and trying to listen in on their conversations.

20. Visits to shops though could lead to disappointment. Young people reported getting upset sometimes at seeing things that they could not afford. Some also indicated frustration at saving up for an item only for it not to be available in their size.

Young People's areas of concern

21. **The Media:** Throughout our conversations with young people they all wanted to indicate how they feel they are unfairly treated by the media. *'…..the news is not necessarily untrue but it is biased.'* Young people said that the coverage of them in the media has led directly to adults thinking they are trouble makers.

22. Young people wanted to know why the media thought it was okay to only publish bad news about them. They wanted the media to recognise that there are good news stories out there if only they would look. For some young people this was their biggest area of concern.

23. One group of young people indicated that the media promoted and maintained existing stereotypes and did not represent the real world. *'Why are disabled people never shown in the media?'*

24. **Data protection:** The young people in our groups were very aware of new media and all reported been confident in using it. But they still wanted to know how companies could get hold of their email addresses and mobile phone numbers. Especially when this meant they received targeted adverts

for age inappropriate products.

25.   **Celebrity/Fashion:** Young people thought that celebrity endorsement was part of the culture in which we now live, *'...but not all celebrities are air heads'*. For some this culture meant they felt under pressure to look a certain way. For example celebrities can wear daft and stupid things and be adored for doing so. But if a young person was to do the same thing then they could be bullied for being different, and the bullying would not only come from other young people but from other sectors of society.

26.   One group felt that the fashion/modelling industry also placed unrealistic expectations on the way they should look. The fashion industry made no attempt to publicise where images have been touched up or to show people in a natural state. This was disappointing for the group as the young people felt they could help young people develop confidence and a sense of individuality if they behaved differently.

REPORT ON THREE FOCUS GROUPS HELD TO DISCUSS THE IMPACT OF THE COMMERCIAL WORLD ON CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

This summarises the responses of 25 parents (mothers and fathers) from Marion Richardson Primary School in Stepney who talked to us on 20th October 2008. Three group sessions were held simultaneously. The parents present were predominantly British Bengali parents but also a few white British ones too.

Responses are listed in relation to the ten questions asked although because of the nature of the conversations and the questions asked, there was some cross-over between the topics discussed.

Summary of responses

1.   What you think is good about the adverts that your children see?

1.1   Adverts can be fun

Overall the respondents did not like advertisements, particularly those which were marketing commercial products and services at their families. However some parents acknowledged that they and their children really liked watching them. One parent said that both he and his children felt that the advertisements on television were often better than the programmes in between them.

One parent felt it was important for children to know what was out there and to be aware of advertising and how it worked.

1.2   Positive messages

Overall parents were more positive about advertising which promoted positive social or health messages or adverts which encouraged children to behave well or give to charities. There was some anxiety about very disturbing adverts such as those for road safety involving the death of a child although this group agreed could be useful for starting a conversation on difficult topics.

Some people liked campaigns which made children more aware of the world around them and made them think in more responsible ways. Some welcomed campaigns promoting recycling for example as they influenced the child's behaviour and, through them, often had a positive impact on the whole family. Others found it irritating or embarrassing when their children started to lecture them or other people – for example around cigarette smoking.

Parents tended to like adverts which presented positive images of family life or reinforced things they were trying to do themselves. Two groups quoted the Sainsbury's adverts which showed how to cook a family meal for £5:

> "Children can get the cards, buy the items on the card and go and ….encourage then parents to cook a meal….cook it all together…it brings the family together rather than just eating out just here and there"

They welcomed both the healthy eating messages and the emphasis on money saving.

2.   What do you think is bad about the adverts your children see?

2.1   No escape

The groups were very vocal about the things they did not like about advertising. It was felt that there was too much advertising generally and too much of it aimed specifically at children. They felt if was impossible to escape from it particularly on the television because there is so much television and so many channels carrying advertising. Even children's channels are available all the time with cable and catch-up so it is difficult for parents to turn it off:

> *"Advertising just goes beyond a joke. It even stretches into seven, eight o'clock at night. Especially if you go on the children's channels…there is far too much of it and my children just get so much of it."*

Larger families with children of widely varying ages said they found it very hard to find television programmes and channels which were suitable for the whole family:

> *"If you have older children and then you have smaller children you have to constantly be switching from what's appropriate for them and then speaking to the older ones on their level as well, so you know, for parents…it's like a war zone"*

Parents particularly disliked the endless repetition of the same advertisements on the television and the way in which children absorbed and were able to repeat the messages or catch-phrases they had heard. One described it as brainwashing.

There was a strong sense that most advertising was a sort of conspiracy by profit-making businesses to mislead people into buying poor quality products at over-inflated prices and that the only people who benefitted from it were these businesses.

2.2   Pressure on adults and children leads to family tension

There was a strong sense that advertising of all sorts creates pressure on parents and on children: pressure on children to achieve an unrealistic level of perfection or to possess things that they do not have and pressure on parents to provide the things their children see and want:

> *"In every advert she says "Mummy can I have that, Mummy I really need that". And that is every time there is an advert she will do that…and then obviously the younger one copies, "I want it, can I get it, I need it" and then my son is like "Well how comes they get everything, I want Beyblades."*

> *"It's kind of glamorising a world that doesn't really exist. It's not real… they make it so glossy, it's so photoshopped…especially like aimed at young teenagers as well. It's like a world that you can just never get there."*

Some parents felt confident about saying "no" to their children whilst others found it very difficult. Those who felt able to do it admitted that it had taken them some time to learn how to do it and to be able to do it with confidence.

It was clear that for some families the negotiation or arguments prompted by advertising can create problems leading to arguments between parents and children and tantrums from the child. It also led to friction between the adults with children playing one off against the other or with parents arguing about how to respond to child's requests. Children used different tactics depending on their age and parents had to have a wide range of different strategies at their disposal.

Some parents reported feeling under very strong pressure the pressure to buy products they could not afford or did not want to buy. Some also worried that if they did not give their children what they wanted, they might feel such a need to buy the things that they might end up stealing from their family or others.

2.3 Inappropriate messages and images

Many parents were unhappy with the sorts of images presented by television advertising in particular those that they saw as presenting an unrealistic view of the world which was often sexualised to an extend that made them uncomfortable and glorified alcohol, fast cars etc. Bill board advertising featuring nudity was also singled out as being particularly offensive and embarrassing to parents when with their children.

Some felt that the representation of ethnic minorities had increased and were pleased to see this but others felt that the world of the advertisements was as stereotyped as ever. One parent of a disabled child pointed out that very few advertisements ever showed images of children with disabilities.

2.4 Negative impact on young people

The respondents also disliked the prevalence of images of very thin or very "glamorous" women which lead girls and young women to think of themselves and the female adults around them as over-weight and unattractive. They felt this created pressure on young women and could lead to low self-esteem:

> *"It is something that doesn't exist….it's not getting children self esteem. You know they end up growing up with low self esteem, no confidence and feeling inadequate about themselves, how it makes them feel as human beings."*

One mother gave the example of her young daughter watching a television advert where a woman had thick, straight glossy hair allegedly as a result of using a particular shampoo and wanting to buy the shampoo in order to achieve the same effect when her mother knew that she had an entirely different sort of hair.

3. What do your children like about shopping?

3.1 Shopping can be fun

Parents overall thought their children liked to shop and that they found it exciting because they are always thrilled at the idea of getting something new.

Several of the parents, particularly those of older girls, reported that they enjoyed shopping with their daughters and felt it could be a fun activity helping them to bond with their children as well as allowing them to teach their children to think sensibly about shopping and money:

> *"Once you get over the initial teaching a child not to go crazy at the sight of so much shopping….then shopping can be a really nice experience…I would never have known how to do it if I hadn't attended parenting classes but because I learnt the skills on how to manage the children in the supermarket it is really enjoyable."*

3.2 Fantasy shopping

Many of the parents identified the Argos catalogue phenomenon where their children would spend hours poring over the catalogue counting off all the things that they wanted. It was clear that they took great pleasure in this activity and would often spend long periods drawing up lists and working out how much their imaginary haul would cost:

> *"He opens it page after page, laughing and smiling and showing us – look, look, look. Smiling so happy looking at the pictures."*

Another parent reported a similar enthusiasm for the items in the catalogue:

> *"He texted his dad and he said "Can you go to Argos tomorrow and can I have £300"*

Some parents felt that this was something they should discourage as it made their children greedy but others saw it as a reasonably harmless activity as long as children understood that they could not in fact have everything that they wanted. For many children this sort of activity led to them identifying things they wanted for birthdays or other special occasions. It also gave them something to look forward to and a goal to save towards which parents often saw as a good thing.

3.3   Developing financial skills

Parents recognised that children needed to learn to handle money and to appreciate its value. Many encouraged their children to do this by giving them pocket money or limiting their budget and getting them to work out what they could buy or how much they would need to save:

> *"I give her the concept of, okay this is your pocket money, anything extra you need to do you need to save from here. Whatever you save then you can go out and treat yourself. It is not a question of whenever we go shopping I'll just get you whatever you want. If there is something that you want that you don't need then you need to save for it and I will give you the bare necessities of what you need."*

3.4   Giving to charities

Some parents reported that their children also responded to advertising from charities and liked to give money to others whom they saw as being less fortunate than themselves. For some of the respondents, this was an important part of their culture and something which they positively encouraged when their children talked about spending their money.

4.   What do your children dislike about shopping?

4.1   Do parents win or give in?

Parents felt that overall children enjoyed shopping when they associated it with getting something that they wanted. The converse of this however was that both the parents and their children disliked shopping when it involved parents telling children they could not have what they wanted.

For parents of younger children, supermarket shopping in particular often created huge amounts of stress. If children wanted things that their parents were not prepared to buy for them, there was a risk that children would misbehave. Parents felt torn between their desire to be firm with their children and their anxiety that their children would make a scene in public. To add to this tension, parents felt that they would be judged by others if they "gave in" to their children's bad behaviour but also judged if they did not handle their children's behaviour well. Many of the parents opted to go supermarket shopping without their children whenever possible.

4.2   Striking a balance

Parents of older children recognised that difficulties could also be created if they allowed their children to go shopping on their own, but then disapproved of their purchases when they got home. The way around this was to lay down clear guidelines about how much the child could spend and any other limitations. Some resolved this issue by accompanying their child for critical or expensive purchases, but allowing them greater freedom and some choice for other purchases.

Parents needed to be able to negotiate with their children but also say "no" firmly when they meant it. Some parents found that they were able to negotiate a deal with their children that

was acceptable to all. Others found that if they allowed any negotiation, their children would never accept "no" for an answer so preferred to make an absolute decision and stick to it, allowing no room for negotiation.

## 5.	Do your children ask you to buy them things because they have seen them on TV or other places?

### 5.1	Pester power

Parents were very vocal about the way in which children were encouraged to ask for things by television and other media. Like advertising, product and lifestyle promotion was seen as inescapable. Many parents described their children's relentless pestering for new and usually expensive toys, gadgets and equipment.

Children were particularly interested in expensive gadgets and games including iPods and mobile phones and were acutely aware of what was the latest and most fashionable version. Depending on the age of their children, some parents felt that it was useful for their children to have phones (especially if they travelled alone or were out in the evenings) but they also worried that possessing the latest version put their children at increased risk of mugging or theft. Although most schools seemed to ban such equipment, children normally ignored the bans.

For some parents there were issues around the heavy advertising of violent computer games which were seen by children below the age for which the game was certified. Several parents spoke of wanting to find more appropriate and educational games but not knowing where to look. They also recognised that the marketing made the big commercial games more attractive.

### 5.2	Peer pressure

Parents recognised that some of the pressure their children came under was from other children who either already had things or talked about the things they wanted or were hoping to be given. Some parents talked about their children always wanting to "keep up" with their friends. Parents had different responses to this, some spending time talking to their children about what they could realistically afford and whether things were really worth the money, and others feeling anxious that if they were not able to give their children what others had, they would be seen as the "poor" family:

> "If they don't go in there with their designer tops and their designer trainers then they'll look like they are from a poor family, you know so that is when you feel under pressure."

There were also concerns that children would be bullied if they did not have the "right" stuff:

> "They are making bullies: "Ha ha, you don't have one!""

## 6.	Do your children ask you to buy them things you wouldn't normally buy because of commercial pressure?

### 6.1	Tie-ins and free gifts

Many parents reported having to deal with children wanting particular products which their parents would not otherwise buy. They particularly highlighted the packaging of food products which either created an association with some other product (such as tie-ins with movies) or the way in which children would want to buy a product because there was a "free gift" thrown in. This included gifts included with children's magazines, with fast food and hidden in the heel of shoes. Parents were cynical about these "gifts" as they felt that the products themselves were often both more expensive than other similar products and inferior in quality. They particularly disliked it when children were encouraged to make multiple purchases in order to complete a "set". This applied to fast food meals, sticker collections

which required a large number of small purchases and "construction magazines" where you had to buy all of them to complete a project.

However several parents reported that they liked to teach their children to think about how they were being influenced to buy certain products and said that they noticed that children became more sceptical about such offers as they got older.

6.2   Spending money or spending time?

Some parents felt torn between the need to work even harder in order to pay for the things their children wanted and their own desire to spend more time with their children.   This was seen as being particularly hard for single parents:

> *"Parents are working so they buy some stuff for the children so they are busy with this because they don't have enough time to look after the children. That is why they buy."*

6.3   Developing strategies

Most parents had found ways of handling this pressure from their children such as encouraging children to wait for birthdays or other special occasions to receive the things they wanted. Similarly some parents wanted their children to find ways of saving up for what they wanted either from pocket money or from earning money through completing chores or doing school work well.

Most of the parents felt their children appreciated things more if they had to wait for them and that through this approach they learn the value of their purchases.

6.4   School uniform

Several parents, particularly those of secondary school children, found that school uniform was helpful in reducing competitiveness between children and assisting parents in being clear about the clothes they were prepared to pay for. Some felt uniform helped to reduce the likelihood of their children being looked down upon if they were not able to afford the latest fashions.

7.   Apart from adverts in magazines and on television are there any other ways companies get in touch with your children?

7.1   The brands that get everywhere

The impact of tie-ins connecting one product with another such as pasta in the shape of TV characters or film promotion on cereals has been discussed above (6.1). There was strong dislike of very heavily marketed film related "brands" such as "High School Musical" where numerous different products such as toys, magazines, clothes all carry the brand.

7.2   School tokens and vouchers

There was some discussion of school tokens where parents receive vouchers for school equipment depending on how much they spend in a particular shop. Parents felt that their children were under pressure from schools to bring in as many vouchers as possible and that some schools made children feel competitive about this. Parents felt under pressure from their children, and to some extent from schools, to go to particular shops and to spend more money than they otherwise would.

Parents were aware that companies were able to get to their children via mobile phones and the internet. They were concerned about mobile phone deals where children would, for

example, download a ring tone and then discover they had bought into a deal which cost more than they had originally expected. Several of the parents had had similar experiences where either they or their children had signed up for some sort of "deal" and been caught out in some way and ended up spending more than they had intended.

7.3 Internet

Parents were fairly vague about the advertising their children were exposed to through the internet. This appeared to be because the parents were not very knowledgeable about the internet and felt that their children knew more about it than they did.

7.4 Catalogues

As with the Argos phenomenon described earlier, parents were sometimes uncomfortable when catalogues turned up in the post. It was not clear whether they were referring to unsolicited mail or catalogues they had ordered but they disliked the way their children would read them and then ask to have the things they saw in them.

8. At what age do you think children should be allowed to make decisions about what they buy?

8.1 Learning financial independence

Most parents felt children needed to learn about money and allowed children to spend their "own" money as they wished. They expected their children to undergo a gradual process of taking on greater responsibility for buying things for themselves. Most of them felt that this began by encouraging small children to learn to save small amounts of their own money. Around secondary school age children were expected to want to go shopping themselves although, as already described, parents tended to retain the right to be involved in important decisions and on the purchase of more expensive items such as school shoes. One mother described how she had worked out that it was better to go with her older daughter and work together to make a choice which satisfied both of them.

Most parents said that they monitored their children's spending, were aware of what their children were buying and expected to continue to do so until their children were earning their own incomes. Most parents had some rules about what money could or could not be spent on. One had banned her daughter from buying magazines because she found them offensive and inappropriate. From the parents' point of view it seemed that most young people accepted this and in some cases welcomed guidance from their parents.

Some parents made a distinction between how their children spent money that they had given them, and how they spent money they had earned themselves or which had been given to them as a reward, believing that a child should have more freedom in choosing how they spent their own money.

For many families, conversations about money resulted in an important process of negotiation in which parents and children had to listen to each other. Several parents said that they felt their teenage children needed to be given some choice and some control within clear guidelines. Through this process, the young people learnt that they had to convince their parents as to why they needed a particular thing, and parents realised that they had to think about what their child was saying to them:

> *"Give them information. Give them examples…Getting them to think all the time. Making them think about the choices that they are making and most importantly listening to their reasoning, their reasons for wanting to be like that. You have to really listen to what your children are saying even if you don't agree with it, even if it*

doesn't make sense to you, if you don't listen to them, that is the start of rebelliousness."

8.2   Rationing the day to day funds

Some parents of older children who had to give them money for lunches etc felt they had to be careful not to give too much money at once in order to avoid their children purchasing cigarettes or other thing they did not wish them to have. They therefore gave out money regularly but in small amounts.

9.   How have the commercial messages children receive changed over time?

9.1   More of it and more "in your face"

The biggest change identified by the parents was the fact that there is far more advertising around. One parent suggested that this was partly to do with the privatisation of public services which had resulted in massively increased competition between new companies. The massive number of commercial television channels and the increase in the amount of television aimed at children was also highlighted as reasons for the increased visibility of advertising.

For some of the parents in the group who had grown up in different cultures, the society their children are now growing up in was radically different to that of their own childhoods. They pointed to the amount of disposal income that people living in this country have compared to their native countries where the emphasis for many was on basic survival.

Parents also expressed regret that their children spent so much time at home watching television and using computers rather than playing outside. One described how her daughter never watched television when they visited her home country but spent all her time outside playing with her cousins.

Several of the parents referred back to the early conversations about the nature of today's advertising and the fact that not only is it constantly present, but also it is very forceful using powerful and often shocking images.

It was generally felt that modern advertising was very "Americanised", presenting images of perfect people, although some people had noticed that some advertising was becoming more like British television and reflecting a society that people recognised more, including people from different races and families that looked real. They reflected that US television remained very popular and that the American view of the world therefore had some appeal.

10.   What benefits do your children get from engaging with the commercial world?

The main benefits which people felt their children were getting were to do with developing the skills to deal with an increasingly commercialised society. These were partly to do with arithmetic but more importantly to do with valuing money, learning to save, working for rewards and making decisions about what is important.

Parents were compelled to work with their children to help them make sensible decisions and become responsible and independent adults:

> *"If I go to the shops with them, they choose what they want in the ranges that I have selected for them with a target price and everything. And they are happy with that."*

For some parents this extended to passing on important messages about their own culture. For example, one parent was teaching her children that they should not spend their money on

expensive designer clothes because it should be spent either on "good" things or to benefit other people.

Parents felt it was very important that their children understood the financial limitations they faced and saw discussions with their children about spending as a meaningful way to do this.

Parents also felt that children needed to understand about marketing and commercialism, and become good consumers by spending wisely and exercising informed choice:

> *"So I suppose it's good that children know what is out there so they can have a choice. So if they know that one product can be bought from different places at different prices maybe. So maybe that is good for them in their future life."*

11.   Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Parents felt they needed strategies for helping their children and their families deal with the challenges presented by the commercial nature of modern society. Parents valued the insights of other parents and welcomed opportunities to find out how other people were dealing with these issues which are common to all families. Some parents thought that schools may be able to provide a place where parents can meet to provide each other with such support.

Some parents thought that more needs to be done to get children away from television. The outside world needs to be more accessible and appealing to children, and parents need to feel children are safe when they go out of the house.

REPORT ON THREE FOCUS GROUPS HELD TO DISCUSS THE IMPACT OF THE COMMERCIAL WORLD ON CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

This summarises the responses of 30 parents in Halifax.

Responses are listed in relation to the ten questions asked although as the nature of the conversations and the questions asked meant that there was some cross-over between the topics discussed.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. What you think is good about the adverts that your children see?

1.1 Entertaining, fun and sometimes educational

Most of the responses to this question focussed on television advertising.

Parents felt that many advertisements were amusing and entertaining and families often enjoy discussing them and how they were made, although several parents pointed out that they and their children often found it difficult to recall what the advertisements were for.

Parents liked health promotion advertisements and singled out the Sainsbury's "Feed your family for a fiver" campaign as positive and useful.

Advertisements for holidays and holiday destinations were cited by one parent as a way of providing information about other parts of the world.

One parent felt that some advertisements sent out positive and useful messages to young people about looking after themselves:

> *"To a certain extent some of these fashion and makeup ones aren't necessarily bad because it might encourage people to just look after themselves a bit more and take care of themselves."*

1.2 Keeping up with events

Advertising was seen as having a role in helping young people keep up with what is going on in the world. Trailers for new films for example might have the social benefit of helping young people decide what to do with their friends.

2. What do you think is bad about the adverts your children see?

2.1 Too many, too often, too stereotyped

Parents felt that their children were exposed to too much advertising and that it was difficult to avoid. They did not like the fact that TV adverts were repeated so often and one felt that this had the effect of "brainwashing".

TV advertisements were seen as an irritation which constantly interrupted programmes although several mentioned that they and their children increasingly use their television packages such as catch-up and Sky Plus to fast forward through or skip advertisements.

The version of the world created by advertising was seen to be unrealistic and stereotypical. There were still clear gender stereotypes to be seen in many adverts and one parent described the world of advertising as "monocultural".

2.2 Creating unreasonable expectations

Some parents felt that much of the advertising their children were exposed to created unrealistic expectations in their children. They saw it as exerting constant pressure on their children to have expensive things and to upgrade regularly in order to keep up with their peers. They recognised too that their children were striving to be "older than their years" and that this was exploited by advertisers.

Parents objected to the amount of advertising apparently aimed at children and young people which promoted very expensive products such as MP3 players, computer games and mobile phones. These advertisements might look like they were aimed at adults but parents believed that they were really aimed at young people and children.

> *"I think there a really funny thing going on with mobile phone adverts….They look as if they're aimed at adults and yet they're put on at a time when children are still watching TV aren't they so the producers of those kinds of ads…must be getting some kind of message across to the younger audience even though on the surface it seems to be aimed at adults."*

Some parents were also unhappy with advertisement which contained overtly sexual images such as adverts for perfumes. Similarly they disliked advertisements where drinking alcohol was presented as glamorous or where drinkers were shown as being "wicked" or funny. They were very aware that some drink adverts were specifically designed through their imagery and language to appeal to young people. Parents also questioned the acceptability of advertisements for adult computer games which promoted war, violence and anti-social behaviour.

2.3   Versions of morality

There were concerns about advertising which appeared to support particular versions of morality which parents found offensive. Advertisements for debt consolidation were seen both to present an attitude towards money which some found dubious and potentially make children and young people feel anxious about their own family's financial affairs. Similarly, advertisements which encouraged people to sue when accidents occur were seen to contribute to the growth of a "blame culture" and a view that all problems can be solved by money.

There were some comments about the sort of moral world that adverts presented where it was acceptable or even fun to, for example, walk across the bonnets of cars or to behave in rude or inconsiderate ways.

2.4   Contradictory messages

Some people pointed out that parents and young people are given one set of messages by the government about issues such as healthy eating and active lifestyles whilst television advertising contradicted this by actively promoting unhealthy food or alcohol consumption.

> *"A lot of the adverts contradict what the government is trying to do as well because one minute they're saying we should be eating healthily and then the next minute we've got Burger King, MacDonald's or KFC."*

2.5   Timing of unsuitable advertising

Parents pointed out that many of the advertisements which they felt were inappropriate for children were broadcast during times that children would be watching televisions such as in the afternoons.

Certain television packages allowed children to watch television programmes at different times of day and this in effect made the idea of an evening watershed meaningless.

2.6   Recognising the complexity

One group of parents had an interesting discussion about how the government ought to regulate advertising, if at all. One member of the group had seen a report on rulings by the Advertising Standards Authority and had been surprised at the number of complaints received about advertisements which she felt had been perfectly acceptable. She had read about a large number of complaints in relation to a toilet paper advertisement where a child had used the word "poo". The parents in this group were puzzled as to why this should be unacceptable when in their view many much more offensive images and messages appeared to be considered acceptable. They acknowledged that this highlighted the difficulties of regulating advertising in a complex society where attitudes and values vary widely.

All the respondents agreed that parents had a vital role to play in helping their children make sense of this complexity and understand what advertisers are trying to do. They felt that schools also fulfilled an important role in terms of teaching children how advertising and the

media worked and instilling a certain degree of scepticism with regard to advertising and other commercial pressures.

Most parents felt that they and their children were quite sophisticated in their understanding of the "game" but both they and their children were aware that advertisers were skilled in staying "one step ahead".

> "*It's your job to provide a kind of filtering mechanism so that the stuffs there, we can't protect them from it, we can't cocoon them but we've got to try and equip them to be able to defend themselves in a way and be able to be unaffected by it. And I think it depends on the individual how easy or difficult that is.*"

3.   What do your children like about shopping?

3.1   Attitudes to shopping vary considerably

It was clear from the responses that attitudes towards shopping and spending money varied considerably from one young person to another. Within families different children have very different views and behaved in very different ways and there was no obvious pattern dependent on age or gender.

Most children like to spend money and have new things but whereas some pursue shopping as a major hobby, constantly comparing things on internet sites and trawling through shops for bargains, others shop occasionally or only when they need something or have spare cash to spend.

3.2   Shopping as a social activity

Many parents find that their children like to "go shopping" as a way of spending time socially with their friends. Often this means spending very little money, if any at all, and simply passing time together, perhaps spending their time and money in cafes rather than shops. One parent observed that her children said they were "going shopping" because it implied "something proactive" which made it more acceptable than saying they were going to hang out on a street corner.

3.3   Shopping as a skill

Many of the parents recognised that their children were very skilled shoppers and often very good bargain hunters. Parents appreciated television programmes which encouraged their children to try to achieve "the look" for less and some were impressed by their children's skills in finding the right things at good prices.

Some young people were actively involved in helping their families make important purchases such as buy new cars or new appliances. They used price comparison websites and price and quality comparison sites like "Which online" to help make decisions and find the best value. One mother described how her son had helped her save money when she was buying a kettle in a department store by using his mobile phone to go online and check if she could get it cheaper elsewhere.

> *"We've just recently got a new car and we went through that (a price comparison site) and I think it's good learning for the children because you're looking at specifications, you're looking at the size, you're looking at what you can afford and they come and explore and sort of choose with you."*

Parents recognised that developing these skills was important for their children as a means of equipping them to deal effectively with an increasingly consumerist and commercially pressurised world where they have to make complex choices.

4.   What do your children dislike about shopping?

4.1   Food shopping

Most young people did not enjoy shopping for food with the family and most parents found it easier to do this sort of shopping on their own. Younger children could be hard to handle in supermarkets because they could be very demanding and saying no could lead to bad and sometimes embarrassing behaviour. Older children tended to want to buy products which their parents would not otherwise buy either because they had seen them advertised or because they believed them to be better in some way and this often resulted in a significant increase in the overall bill.

4.2   Shopping with the family

Very few older children wanted to go shopping with the parents for shopping other than food shopping unless the purpose of the trip was to get something for them. One parent described how her child made them go to a distant shopping centre in order to reduce the risk of being spotted with her parents.

5.   Do your children ask you to buy them things because they have seen them on TV or other places?

5.1   Younger children more obviously influenced by TV

Very young children tended to respond immediately to advertisement by asking to have particular things. Often these were very expensive items but parents were comfortable with simply telling children this age that they could not have them.

5.2   Other influences at work on older children

Although parents recognised the influence of advertising on their children, most felt that peer pressure was a stronger influence especially with older children and teenagers.

5.3   Learning to negotiate

Parents described how, as their children got older, it became more a matter of negotiation, with children entering into the process by trying to find the product that they wanted at the lowest possible price, sometimes assuming (wrongly) that if they can find it more cheaply their parents will buy it for them.

> *"When they decide they want something they google it and they tell you you can buy it at so-and-so because they have found the cheapest place to buy it from and they*

*think that because they are saving money from the top price that we should go out
and buy it because we are saving some."*

6. Do your children ask you to buy them things you wouldn't normally buy because of commercial pressure?

6.1 Commercial pressure, peer pressure or both?

Parents were clear that peer pressure has more of an influence on their children than commercial pressure although some recognised that the two forces are often working together. Parents agreed however that some of the things their children wanted had almost become almost essential to modern life such as mobile phones and internet access. The real commercial pressure related to pushing young people towards wanting to buy more expensive equipment and to repeatedly upgrading.

6.2 The importance of mobile phones and computers in young people's lives

Some parents felt that mobile phones played a very important role in their children's lives and that their social lives depended to some extent on their having access to the same equipment as their friends. Mobile phones were seen as being very important for most children of secondary school age. Because so many interactions and social arrangements are conducted over the phone, a child might be excluded if they do not have a phone.

> *"It's very difficult to get the balance right I find between not wanting your child to be the odd one out ……..sometimes they do feel left out. I waited a while before my eldest had a mobile phone and sometimes he got left out of being invited out because he did not have a mobile phone."*

One parent also gave the example of a teacher in a school encouraging children to use their phones to take photos of an art work they had created. This had caused a problem for her son who did not have a phone.

Access to the internet was important for children not only for social interaction through MSN and social networks (like Bebo, MySpace and Facebook) but also as a day-to-day tool for finding out information and for entertainment.

Most parents wanted their children to be adequately equipped to be part of the modern world but where they felt uncomfortable was in dealing with the demands from some of them to constantly upgrade and change their equipment. Some felt that having expensive phones in particular made their children vulnerable to theft.

6.3 Helping children through the minefield

Most of the parents felt that they had an important role to play in helping their children understand what is reasonable and possible and what is unrealistic. Sometimes they felt that this job was made more difficult by external pressures. Although advertising was seen as part of the problem, they also identified other family members (such as grandparents), the attitudes of other parents, television and "society" in general as contributing to making it harder for them to teach their children to respond sensibly to a consumerist society.

One parent described how her daughter had managed to acquire £130 from friends and grandparents within a few days of a trip to a large shopping centre. Another had refused to buy her child a phone but felt undermined because the child had talked her grandparents into buying her one to keep her "safe". Others talked about their children being allowed to watch inappropriate films whilst at friends houses and this being sanctioned by the friends' parents.

Nevertheless, most of the parents reported a fair degree of success in gradually educating their children as to what they as parents felt was acceptable. Most felt that their children knew when they were likely to say yes and would not make requests that were likely to be refused. They recognised that this was something that had to start at an early age and that although negotiation was more acceptable as children got older, parents still needed to be clear and firm at times and still be able to say "no".

> "So much as they desire these things they don't come out with it verbally too often to us because they know that if it's an unreasonable request that's being made it'll just be laughed at anyway."

> "I don't care if so-and-so got that, you're not having it, they know definitely it's just no!. If I don't think it is appropriate, it it's too expensive, they've got something similar, if it is just an upgrade it's definitely "no", they would have to wait".

Families had evolved well-understood ways of conducting negotiations with their children, allowing them some autonomy and choice whilst at the same time retaining some control. In many families this revolves around pocket money and allowances (described in more detail in section 8).

6.4   When parents find it hard to make a judgement

Some parents felt that there were certain areas where they found it very difficult to judge whether or not to allow their child access to certain products such as computer games.

Whereas they were quite comfortable with ratings on films and would sometimes allow their children to watch films that were of a higher rating than their age, they felt much less able to make such decisions in relation to computer games or websites. They felt that it was relatively straightforward for them to find out about a film either by talking to another adult or watching it themselves but, by contrast, felt that the world of computer and online gaming was a mystery which they could not begin to understand. This same lack of confidence and anxiety extended to much of the internet. This meant that they often did not feel in a strong position to negotiate with their children over such things, particularly as their children were much more skilled and confident than them.

7.   Apart from adverts in magazines and on television are there any other ways companies get in touch with your children?

7.1   Branding and tie-ins

Parents were very aware of the amount of branding around them and their children. This tending to influence younger children and their parents with children demanding tins of pasta which featured cartoon characters and lunch boxes promoting films. They admitted to taking advantage of marketing of this sort to encourage children to try foods they would not otherwise eat but they were also aware that it often meant buying a more expensive product.

One group discussed their children's desire to buy new football strips every season and the emphasis on authenticity. One mother had tried to buy her daughter a cheaper version of a particular team's shirt whilst buying her older son the much more expensive authentic kit but the daughter had been aware of this and had complained that this was not fair.

7.2   Internet and mobile phones

Parents were also aware (often because they had experienced them themselves) of advertising on the internet and how much of it is carefully targeted, particularly on social networking sites. Some used software to block pop-ups but some also said that they believed their children simply did not notice it.

Competitions and offers on mobile phones are often used as ways of getting money from young people or promoting a specific brand. Parents reported that some of their children had been had their finger burnt by things like "free" ringtones or competitions which you have to pay to enter. Generally parents believed that children learnt quite quickly to be sceptical and careful about these sorts of "offers".

7.3   Celebrities and product placement

Many young people's awareness of the commercial world is fed by magazines and television programmes which focus on "celebrities", the clothes they wear, the houses they live in and the lifestyles they lead. An example was given of a certain TV presenter who only ever wore clothes by one designer which the parent saw as a form of advertising.

8.   At what age do you think children should be allowed to make decisions about what they buy?

8.1   Giving children and young people some autonomy

A small number of the parents we talked to did not approve of giving their children pocket money, preferring to give children money for specific purchases or special occasions and waiting for their children to be old enough to earn their own money. However, the majority felt that pocket money and allowances had an important role to play in teaching children and young people to manage money carefully and well.

Most parents gave their children some money of their own to spend from a fairly early age and give larger sums allowing some independent decision-making from around the age of thirteen (although for some this was earlier at around the time of transfer to secondary school at eleven).

It was recognised that children deal with money in a wide range of different ways – some being very keen to save, while others spend it as soon as they are given it. They observed that young people tended to be much more careful and astute about how they spent their own money as compared to when they were spending their parents' money.

8.2   The benefits of bank accounts

Several of the parents spoke about the benefits of allowing young people to have their own bank accounts and learning to manage them. Some parents paid allowances straight into

their children's bank accounts and the young people were then able to manage them on-line and using debit cards. The advantage of accounts aimed specifically at young people is that the account holder cannot go into debt.

8.3   Teaching the value of money

Many parents felt they had a responsibility to help their children understand the value of money and learn to make sensible spending decisions. If they said "no" to their children they wanted them to understand that it was not always because they could not afford something or were being mean, but because they did not want to spend their money in this way.

> "*I just made the point, you've got to think about where you money goes….*"

Many of the parents gave examples of how they liked to give their children money to spend and a certain amount of autonomy in spending it in order to help their children learn how to handle money sensibly.

> "*If I give them some money and they start to learn to get control of their money and make decisions about what they can afford and what they can't afford that's quite a good thing for them to learn as they are growing up.*"

> "*Ultimately they have got to learn to control their own money and make these choices and once they're at secondary school I think that's a good thing to introduce gradually.*"

> "*I actually think they should have some element of choice and I think if you are giving your child pocket money at a certain age I really do think that part of understanding what money is about is being able to make decisions.*"

Some of the parents admitted to a certain amount of hypocrisy when telling their children how to behave when they were aware that they sometimes set a bad example themselves. One mother talked about her own habit of shopping indiscriminately in the sales and coming home with things she did not need just because they were cheap.

9.   How have the commercial messages children receive changed over time?

9.1   Changes since parents were children

Most of the parents interviewed expressed the view that the commercial messages that their children were subjected to were both more relentless and more sophisticated than in their own childhood.

> "*The biggest problem is the speed of technology that you buy something and as soon as you take it out of the shop door its already out of date because there's something else already in production and it is keeping up with that technology or because their friends will always have the next stage and it wasn't like that when we were young, we just plodded along didn't we?*"

As discussed previously, parents felt that their children were less protected from inappropriate messages being delivered at inappropriate times to their children than has been the case in the past but they acknowledged that this was partly as a result of changes to the way in which television operates.

Some of the mothers were concerned by the pressures being put on their daughters in particular to grow up too quickly and to become sexualised too young. They cited "adult" clothing being marketed and young girls and continuous exposure to sexual images in advertisements, magazines and television programmes. But they recognised that this was a complex issue and it was hard to pin down one single factor what was driving it.

> *"Well they wouldn't make them if there wasn't the demand for them and parents weren't buying them would they but I think they try it on…"*

9.2   How things have changed in recent years

Those who had older children as well as younger ones also observed that the pressure on their younger children was greater than it had been on their older children even if the difference was only a matter of five or six years. Several mentioned that whereas only secondary school aged children had mobile phones a few years ago, eight and nine year olds now seem to have them or being asking form them.

Many of the parents felt that there was a great deal more "stuff" that children and young people wanted and were aware of and that it was very expensive.

9.3   Should government intervene?

Some of the parents felt that something should be done to address the concerns they had about commercial and other pressures on their children. Some felt that stricter government controls of advertising might help to address this, but as raised earlier they also recognised that it was often hard to find common ground in terms of what was acceptable and what was not in a complex society where there a wide range of views exists.

Some felt that it was up to individuals to make sure that their views were heard by complaining and campaigning more often rather than simply accepting things they did not like.

10.   What benefits do your children get from engaging with the commercial world?

10.1   Being equipped for adult life in a commercial world

Most of the benefits which parents thought their children derived from the commercial world were, in fact, about equipping them to deal better with the problems and challenges it presented. There was a general view that commercialisation would not go away and was more or less impossible to avoid and that the most useful thing a parent could do was equip a child to stay safe and sensible within it.

There were important messages that most parents wanted to get across to their children which have already been covered such as learning to save and wait for things rather than

being given things immediately on demand; learning to make informed and sensible choices about how to spend their money; being careful about disclosing personal information; being able to find the best value for money; and being aware of the methods businesses use to make them part with their money (sometimes unwittingly). Most of the parents felt that their children needed to be allowed to make mistakes and get "burnt" in order to help them learn these messages.

> *"(They need to) learn about being in the commercial world, because it is a commercial world and to be a bit savvy in it as well, so they experience it and learn. They will probably learn by their mistakes won't they?*

10.2   Other benefits

Few other direct benefits were identified although some of the comments made suggested that parents were keen for their children to "fit in" with their peers and that being a player in the commercial world allowed them to do so.

Some of the parents were clearly impressed by their children's IT skills and the way in which they were able to apply them practically to helping their parents and families although it was not clear whether parents saw these skills as having wider applications beyond shopping and money management.

11.   Are there any other comments you would like to make?

11.1   Getting children to have other experiences

Some concern was expressed that children seem to have lost interest in doing anything other than engaging in commercial and social activity. Young people were seen as defining themselves by what they have and by their social networks rather than by what they do and some parents found this disappointing.

> *"I'd like them to be exposed to more, being encouraged to do things like join the Guides that that we always used to do, now they don't do anything like that. If you are not hip and cool, if you've not got the latest mobile phone, if you can't text for England you're not in the gang, you've no social life, you've nothing. They don't seem to do anything proper".*

11.2   Retaining an element of risk

Although parents had some concerns about how their children would fare in the commercial world, several of them were keen to ensure that society did not become over-protective of young people and deprive them of the opportunity to learn for themselves and become robust and capable.

> *"I suppose I just worry what the government will do because I know we need to protect our children but I sometimes think that we are overly protective, not just to children but in general life".*

An example of this was the prevalence of the mobile phone among young people. Whilst some parents recognised the usefulness of mobile phones to their children, one was concerned that they made life too easy.

> *"(It) takes that risk element away that makes people learn about doing things and meeting up with friends and how to, if you've got a problem, how to solve that problem rather than getting straight on the phone and working it out with your mum and dad and I think sometimes when we were younger and we didn't have modern technology we had to work things out and do things or plan things properly and sometimes technology takes away the risk of learning how to do things".*

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**Customer Voice Research Wave 10:
Children and the Commercial World**

Executive Summary

February 2009

Research objectives

Overall
Research was required with primary and secondary school aged children and young people to understand their experiences of and thoughts about the commercial world and providing a snap shot of the role that the commercial world play in the their lives.

- Explored young people's core values and beliefs, seeking to understand what is important to them in their lives
- Sought to understand the role that money and wealth plays in shaping these values and attitudes
- Determined how they about feel the commercial world – exploring what they see are the benefits and drawbacks
- Painted a picture of the behaviour and pressure points relating to money, pocket money, money management and whether they think this changes with age
- Understood what they think of advertising generally and how they think it influences them specifically (exploring positive and negative impacts)
- Explored attitudes and behaviour relating to products, branding and consumerism; painting a picture of in store shopping and online purchase behaviour
- Explored young people's engagement with different media and technology including TV, Radio, Social Networking Sites, Internet, magazines, newspapers, gaming, mobile phones
- Understood the role of family and the influence of peers in attitudes to the commercial world and pull apart the differences, including whether they feel more or less affected than their family and friends.

Research methodology and sample
- Twelve, two hour friendship quads with children and young people (four in each)
    - Six with primary school aged children (Year 3 to Year 6)
    - Six with secondary school aged children (Year 7 to Year 9)

In total 48 children were consulted

A mix of social economic grades were represented: 60% C2DE/ 40% (A)BC1
People from minority ethnic communities represented relevant to locations

Research locations
Research was carried out across England, ranging from rural to inner city locations

Research findings

As no baseline study was carried out prior to this project, this research did not deliver sufficient evidence to measure the impact, either positive or negative, that the commercial world is having on children and young people. However, this research highlighted that the commercial world forms the back drop to children and young people's lives and in this research sample, no young person shunned the commercial world altogether; most seemed to know that they were living within it and were aware of its allure.

From the conversations held and information gleaned it seemed that the majority of children and young people in this sample had a mix of having things, wanting things and understanding 'no'. The majority of young people in this sample were able to recognise that the commercial world brought benefits to their lives as well as drawbacks, citing for example how mobile phones offered instant communication with friends and security for parents, but they were also aware of the down-side, such as being a target for crime because of their material possessions. This research revealed that the extent to which the commercial world impacted on young people's overall sense of self, seemed to depend on the interplay of the following factors: socio-economic status, stage in education - primary or secondary, geographic location, peer influence, sibling effect, age, gender, individual personality of young person, family values and the role and influence role of their extended family.

Core values and beliefs

In this research, children and young people were invited to discuss what and who was important to them in their lives. All within this sample expressed that family and friends were the most important parts of their lives. They recalled examples of shared moments with their families and highlighted qualities they valued in their friends, such as trust, kindness and humour. When discussions developed about the commercial world, respondents' insights were peppered with anecdotes that included family and friends, for example, playing on their games consoles and competing with their parents.

Self esteem, hobbies and interests

Children and young people in this sample reported participating in a vast spectrum of activities, some of which seem to offer them the opportunity of developing skills, making new friends and building interests and self confidence. It seemed that the majority of those children and young people in this research sample, who spent their free time engaging in extra-curricular hobbies and interests, were affirmed by what they do and like, rather than by what they have in material terms. This research revealed that hobbies and activities appeared to be a healthy complement to the commercial world. Some young people recognised that some activities can become entwined with commercial pressures, such as the need to have the latest football boots and it was noted that most activities tended to be through private, paid commercial ventures.

There were some people in this sample who did not seem to participate in any formal extra-curricular activities. In this sample they tended to come from lower socio- economic households. They reported spending the majority of their free time indoors watching TV, playing games on the computer and consoles and spoke with passion about the levels they have reached in their gaming repertoire.

This project highlighted that for those children who participated; extra-curricular activities were an important part of exploring and building their identities. Likewise, the children in this research who did not seem to be involved in such activities seemed to turn to the commercial and over identified with its offerings such as technology as an alternative hobby.

Technology

Among this sample of children, technology was spoken about passionately and animatedly.
It seems to have become integral to the lives of children and young people in this study and they use technology to facilitate their lives: gossip, learn, socialise, create, explore, flirt, play, build friendships, discover and experiment.

However, some reported that they can become fixated on getting the next big thing in the world of technology, especially as technology products become obsolete much quicker that traditional toys. This creates a sense of needing to keep up amongst their peer group.

Assessing the Impact of the Commercial World on children's Wellbeing – Sherbert research

Internet: For the majority of children and young people in this sample, the internet has become central to their lives, and they majority of them reported having broadband internet access at home. Only two out of a total of forty-eight children in this sample had a computer but no internet access at home. The children reported having at least one computer in a central location in the house so their parents could monitor usage and ensure sharing amongst siblings. Many older children reported having their own laptops.

The top three internet uses among this sample were; gaming, homework research and social networking; and the majority used 'Google' as their first port of call for finding things out. You Tube was very popular amongst most ages in this sample and was mostly used for looking up funny clips which were discussed at school. A minority of this sample reported uploading their own videos but many said they wanted to be on You Tube themselves

Social Networking (SNS): SNS has become an important communication channel for many children and has become a primary leisure activity. All older children (10+) reported being signed up to an email account, MSN account and members of at least one SNS site. Children and young people in this sample reported choosing their SNS sites based on what their friends are using, which meant that some had multiple memberships with friends from different places. (e.g. Bebo for school, Piczo for friends from gymnastics, Facebook for older friends)

Young people in this sample, particularly girls, reported spending hours in the evening online, looking at profiles and photos, which have become a huge part of the SNS experience. The immediacy of technology seems to have elevated the role of friends among young people in this sample as they reported being able to instantly contact friends when they needed some emotional support.

Respondents reported multitasking when online; watching TV and doing homework and communicating via MSN (which is free). Much of this seems driven by the fact that they said they do not like feeling as though they are missing out if their friends are having a chat online.

Many younger children (8/9 years) in this sample were members of child friendly sites e.g. Club Penguin, Build a Bear and the reported enjoying the communication and playing games with others. Some of these sites cost money and they said their parents were willing to pay.

Mobile phones: For the children and young people in this sample, mobile phones were a necessary tool to socially 'keep up'. Most in this sample seemed to have a mobile phone from the age of 10 and all seemed to have one by the time they reached secondary school. Under 10s reported being given their parents' cast offs which were used for parents to call them and for playing games (usually they had little or no credit).

This research revealed that the over 10s spent between £10 to £30 a month on credit and that those children from single parent families seemed to spend more as they would receive money for credit from both parents. Some children in this sample, mostly from higher social economic families were on contracts automatically paid for by their parents and seemed unaware how much their monthly bill cost. Those with pay as you go felt that they learned to be careful with their credit, as it can be problematic if it runs out.

Children and young people in this research sample spent their phone credit on texting rather than calls as phoning was seen as being too expensive and they enjoyed the excitement of sending and receiving texts. They also reported enjoying using the video function on their phones, capturing mucking about with friends, attempting stunts and then sharing the clips with each other.

Games consoles: Most households represented by this research sample had one, if not more games consoles and gaming had become a regular leisure activity at home. It was common for young people in this sample to have their own personal gaming device; the Nintendo DS was popular with and boys the PSP. The Wii seemed to have revolutionised gaming, making it a more social, family based activity and more inclusive for girls. The more 'serious' games consoles seemed to be a core pillar in the lives of boys in this sample, particularly between 11 to 14 years. They played them on their own when they came home from school most evenings and with friends. Some played interactively. Many reported having games that were certificate 18 and bought by family on their behalf.

Most children and young people in this sample reported that their parents placed time restrictions on gaming to encourage children to balance their time. However, some children felt that this could be negotiated or ignored.

TV: All children in this sample reported having at least one TV in their homes and watching TV remains one of their favourite indoor activities. For some playing on games consoles and the internet is preferred to TV. Some older kids (10+) were watching TV via the internet. Some in this sample over 10 years old had TVs in their bedrooms.

In this sample most children and young people reported watching TV for at least 2 hours a day. Some said they watched a little before school if they were allowed and then after school; either before, after or during their homework. The resurgence of Saturday night 'big shows' has reportedly created a family viewing time, which many families seemed to make an occasion and the children in this sample recounted enjoying.

TV programmes are another source of social currency in the playground, as children and young people within this sample reported talking about TV programmes with their friends at school. Apart from enjoying soaps and cartoons, many also felt that programmes can open up the world to them, exposing them to new ideas and fuelling some ambition; particularly those who were watching special interest channels (wildlife, cars, travel, makeover programmes) and many of the younger children in this sample found some children's television educational and stimulating.

Across this sample of children, the physical TV has also grown into a competitive status symbol; according to them a TV is preferably large, with a flat screen and Sky + as it often has a dominating presence in the main family room.

Radio: Most respondents in this sample felt they could live without radio and preferred watching music on TV. The radio was mostly listened to in the car, its role simple to minimise boredom on journeys. A few older boys listened to football news.

Many in this sample listened to commercial stations and felt that the adverts and talking interfered with the music, so preferred listening to a CD or their iPod. Among the older young people in this sample (13+) it seemed that some of the social messages announced on the radio were cutting thorough (teenage pregnancy, drugs).

Money
Children across this sample seemed to believe that money played an important role in relation to the provision of basic needs, and no one in this sample felt money was more important than relationships with families and friends. They did not seem to judge each other over how well-off they seemed and valued personalities over wealth.

Children from families of higher social economic standing in this sample reported receiving regular pocket money and recalled how their parents had taught them to understand and learn the value of money and budgeting. Children in this sample from lower socio economic families reported being given money on a more ad hoc basis, when they asked for it. They explained that this meant they often ending up receiving a higher total overall than their friends who received regular pocket money.

Reading
Most children in this sample expressed an interest in books and magazines. Books offered them some quiet time and a chance to escape into their own private world. Magazines for girls seemed to be a social experience, a chance for peers to share gossip. The older girls in this sample felt that magazines provided them with an insight into womanhood. However, it was revealed in this research, that they seemed particularly vulnerable to misinformation, particularly in relation to the portrayal of celebrities in gossip magazines, as some in this sample showed evidence of having a distorted body image and desire to look and behave a certain way. Newspapers were less widely read across this sample, most reported looking at their local papers for relevant features e.g. kidnapped children, paedophiles, knife crime (all) and some boys reported having a look at the sports pages and topless women. Girls reported being more interested in the classified section.

Brands and advertising:

Brands: In this research, brands emerged as becoming increasingly important for young people between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The young people consulted with within this age bracket admitted that when someone at school had something desirable it made them really want the same thing. Brands were seen as helping to create a common bond among friends, signifying group cohesion and helping people feel included. All of the children in the sample said they valued their friends' personalities over the brands they buy and the clothes they wear.

Younger children (under 10) seemed less brand aware than the older respondents in this sample. They knew big brand names but brands as a symbol of something bigger did not seem to have penetrated their psyche. Brands appeared relatively low down on their list of life priorities.

Advertising: Children in this sample reported enjoying many different adverts on TV, some of which they regarded as entertaining and creative. They seemed aware that an advert's aim is to sell, however this was not always top of mind when they watched them. Children in this sample were easily able to recall adverts that had driven a desire to purchase products, be they food or toys and games or make up. Most in this sample were able to recall charity adverts and campaigns e.g. drink driving which they found shocking. Through both the entertaining and more serious adverts, children in this sample seemed to be building brand relationships and internalising messages targeted at people their age and adults.

With the exception of sports and games advertisements, online advertising was considered annoying among this sample of young people and online advertising did not always feel targeted at them. Most claimed to ignore adverts when they popped up or flashed, unless they were competitions offering realistic prizes like phone credit or iPods.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Many children and young people in this sample found the idea of corporate social responsibility interesting and some were able to recall the social interventions of shops or brands, particularly when they related to gifts to schools. Others had not heard of CSR. The majority of children and young people spoken with for this research did not question the motivation of brands who were involved in CSR initiatives.

Shopping:

Many children in this sample expressed active concern for the environment. However, their shopping habits seemed to bear little or no relationship between their concerns and their consumption of disposable fashion and technology.

Shopping was reported as a being a core weekend activity for girls and some boys in this sample. When they reached the age (10 to 12 years old) of being allowed 'into town' without adult supervision they recalled feeling excited and independent. Many of this age range reported being allowed to hang around the shopping centres with friends as it was perceived as safe, with lots of people milling around and CCTV cameras.