

THE ETHICS (OR NOT) OF MARKETING TO CHILDREN

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THE ESCALATING COMMERCIALISATION OF CHILDHOOD

MARKETING TO CHILDREN

WGBH
NEWS

1983
\$100 million

2014
\$17 billion

Source: Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

1. There is widespread concern about the implications of marketing to children and the consequences of its promotion of values of consumerism and overconsumption in negatively affecting children's wellbeing and psychological development.
2. However, despite the ubiquitous presence of marketing in children's environments, children's actual exposure to the full range of marketing across all media and in multiple settings remains unknown.

CONTEXT: PRE-SCHOOLERS AND TELEVISION

- Advertising is increasingly beginning in early childhood with television programmes and the advertising that accompany them now targeted directly at pre-school children (Kunkal and Castonguay 2011)
- Children of all ages still spend more time with television than all other forms of media combined (Common Sense Media 2011), and for pre-schoolers it is the primary mode of commercial communication (Gunter, Oates and Blades 2005).
- The implications of very young children being targeted as consumers has been identified as an area currently under researched (Pine, Wilson and Nash 2007)

PUBLIC POLICY CONCERNS WITH ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN

Two key issues (Armstrong and Brucks 1988, Bandyopadhyay, Kindra and Sharp 2001)

- ▶ When is advertising to children 'fair'
- ▶ What are the effects of advertising to children
- The ability to understand advertising develops over time as a function of children's cognitive development, rather than through experience with media exposure (John 1999)
 - ▶ Theory of Mind (McAlister and Cornwell 2009, 2010)

RESEARCH ON PARENTAL CONCERNS

- ▶ Research has primarily focused on older children (5-12 years) (e.g. Young et al. 2003, Moore 2007, Chan and McNeal 2003, Hudson, Hudson and Peloza 2008);
- ▶ Little research has investigated the attitudes and concerns of parents toward television advertising and children (Young, de Bruin and Eagle 2003, Moore 2007).
- ▶ Young children are seen as the most intellectually and emotionally vulnerable television audience (Warren 2003); parents with younger children may hold stronger concerns about advertising (Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle 2007)

PRE-SCHOOLERS AND MEDIATION OF TELEVISION

- ▶ Studies have consistently found that parents use mainly restrictive mediation for children in this age group (Vandewater et al., 2005; Warren, 2003, Buijzen and Dens 2007, Nathanson, Eveland, Park, & Paul, 2002).
- ▶ Rules for television viewing are more likely to be in place the younger the child is (Ofcom 2012).
- ▶ Active mediation has no effect on younger children due to their limited cognitive abilities to process information (Buijzen and Mens 2007, Calvert 2008).

PURPOSE

From a public policy perspective:

- To understand the extent, nature and complexity of parental concerns regarding television advertising to pre-school children
- To understand the practices parents use to mitigate their concerns

RESEARCH DESIGN

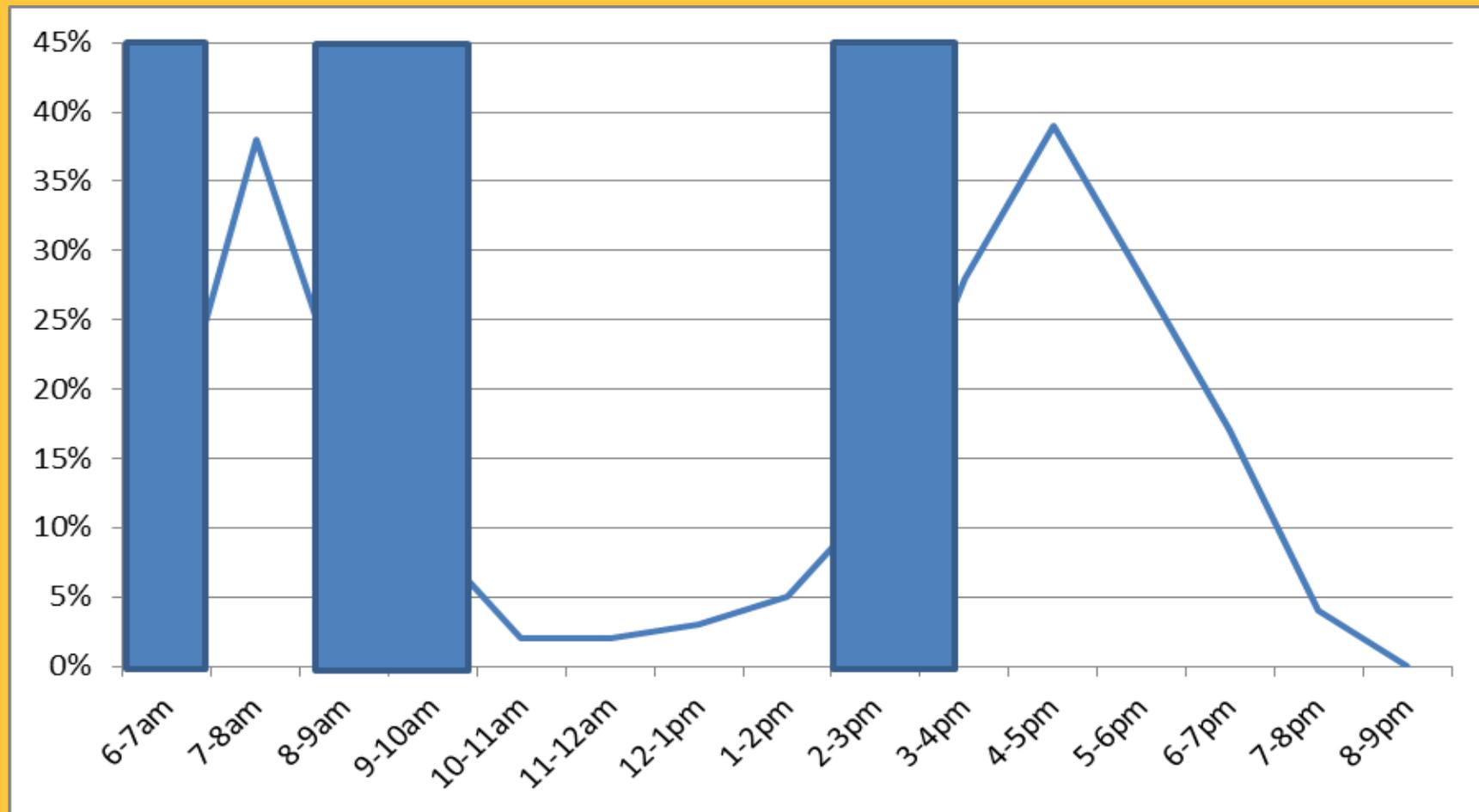
A self-administered, ten-part online questionnaire sent to parents via pre-schools, play-centers, kindergartens and home-based care providers in two NZ cities.

- ▶ Section 1: Pre-schoolers' viewing behaviour, restriction strategies and reasons for restriction.
- ▶ Section 2 - television advertising: parents level and type of concerns, the restrictive strategies and their reasons for restriction.
- ▶ Attitude statements related to television advertising to children (adapted from Young et al. 2003 and Chan and McNeal 2003) and its regulation (adapted from Walsh, Laczniak and Carlson 1998).
- ▶ Demographic data

VIEWING PATTERNS

- 29 % of parents reported that during a typical weekday their pre-schoolers watch one hour of television, while a further 25% reported two hours of viewing.
- 16% of families said their pre-schooler watched no television at all
- Lack of overlap between industry designated pre-school viewing time and parents' reported peak viewing times for their children suggesting that self-industry regulation is out of step with the reality of pre-schoolers' viewing patterns

BROADCASTER'S DEFINITION OF PRE-SCHOOLERS' VIEWING TIMES & ACTUAL VIEWING TIMES



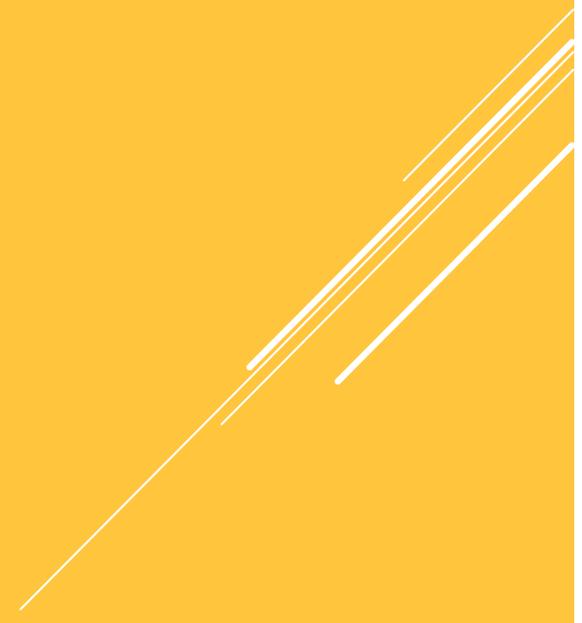
REASONS FOR RESTRICTING ADVERTISING

- ▶ 39% of parents moderately or very concerned about advertising
- ▶ *“Advertising promotes unhealthy values in all of us and I think kids aren’t equipped to understand how they are being manipulated (ethical propriety of advertising to children) or how distorted the images are (stereotyping). I don’t agree with creating consumers who have to have the latest everything (materialism). I don’t agree with advertisers employing techniques to encourage children to nag their parents (nag factor), or making children feel alienated or unattractive if they don’t have the right products (social conformity)”.*

THEMES

- ▶ Propensity to discourage interaction and activity
 - ▶ Exposure to inappropriate content
 - ▶ Negative effect on psychological/social development
 - ▶ Debilitating effect on mood and behaviour
 - ▶ Addictive nature
 - ▶ Ethical concerns
 - ▶ Pester Power
 - ▶ Pressures resulting from differences between parental and advertising values
- 

MORE THEMES

- ▶ The promotion of materialism
 - ▶ The positioning of children as consumers and the promotion of consumer culture
 - ▶ The emphasis on social conformity
- 

RESTRICTION STRATEGIES

Overall 60% of parents report deliberately restricting their preschoolers' advertising exposure, of these:

- 68% restrict what channels their preschoolers can watch;
 - 67% define programme choice;
 - 55% specify particular viewing times;
 - 53% restrict the amount of viewing time;
 - 32% restrict their children to advertising free videos or DVD's,
 - 11% do not allow their preschooler to watch any television
- ▶ 74% rarely or never used instructive mediation

ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING

- 81% agreed that “Television advertising aimed at pre-school children should be restricted”
- 55% agreed it should be banned
- 84% disagreed that “Most pre-schoolers understand the purpose of advertising”
- 80% agreed that “the more advertising children watch the more they want the product advertised”
- 92% agreed that “In general, advertising leads children to want more things”

CONTRIBUTION

- Internationally comparative data suggests a greater level of concern and stronger negative attitudes towards advertising amongst parents of young children
- Supports restrictive mediation strategies as most commonly used strategy with younger children
- Provides greater insight into the complexity of parental concerns
- Reveals an underlying concern that advertising to young children promotes consumer culture, positions children as consumers and encourages consumption as a social norm

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Provides evidence of widely shared and strongly held concerns
- Suggest policy is not currently in line with parents' greater concern and desire for restriction for this age group
- Establishing the pertinence of parents' concerns at this earlier age may provide additional impetus to influence effective public policy decisions relating to age-specific regulatory restrictions
- Increased regulatory policy around advertising to pre-schoolers would greatly diminish the need parents feel to restrict their child's viewing and would allow parents to focus on the more positive experiences that media exposure can provide.

HARM OR GOOD? FONTERRA MILK IN SCHOOLS

To gain public and key stakeholder opinion on the introduction of free milk in schools and to consider the relationship between corporate social behaviour and the ethics of marketing to children.



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Definitions of CSR are many and varied (Garriga and Mele 2004; Diener, 2013).

Broadly, a company's actions in respect to its perceived social obligations (Torelli, Monga and Kaikati 2012).

Increasing pressure to both behave responsibly and make a profit (Mohr, Webb and Harris 2001).

CSR

Align business imperatives with societal issues to create shared value and mutual benefit (Porter and Kramer 2006).

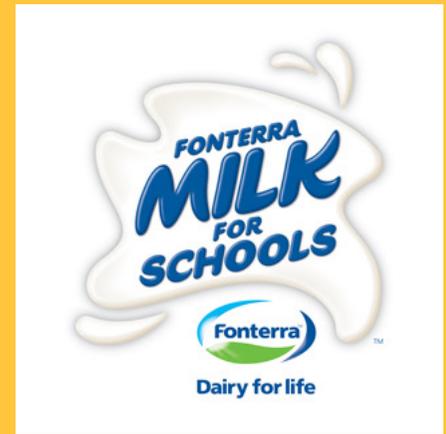
Marketing has an obligation to balance the demands of the corporation with those of its social constituents and emphasise the need to honour its moral as well as its legal responsibilities (Laczniak and Murphy 2013).

ASPIRATIONAL BENEFIT

Where socially-motivated corporate action results in ethically acceptable corporate behaviour there is enormous potential to make a positive contribution to society and the ways in which its values are enacted and upheld (Garriga and Mele 2004).



BACKGROUND



The provision of free (or subsidised) milk in schools has been recognised by governments as an efficient and economically expedient way to provide health and welfare benefits to the more vulnerable members of society (Kunkel, Wilcox, Cantor, Palmer, Linn and Dowrick 2004).

Free milk is an example of the explicit relationship between government and society. The governments involved consider it part of their social responsibility to provide the necessary ingredients to encourage a successful start to each child's daily educational journey.

Fonterra's premium milk brand, Anchor, was delivered in 300ml co-branded cartons along with branded fridges and dedicated recycling bins. The NZ Herald called this the country's "biggest ever act of corporate philanthropy" (Morrah 2013), and, Fonterra themselves, "the single biggest community investment in NZ" (Spierings 2013).



MOTIVATIONS

Re-build its reputation following a number of public health scares and accusations of corporate negligence?

Prepare the public for increase in dairy production (and the consequences for the environment)?

Increase in sales?

Build brand loyalty?



ISSUES

- ▶ Children are not able to recognise the difference between commercial and non-commercial appeals or to understand their different motivations (Roedder 1999; Buckingham 2007; Calvert 2008; McAlister and Cornwell 2010; Kunkel 2010).
- ▶ The effects of increased exposure to commercial media on children's psychological and social development are not well understood
- ▶ “commercialising programmes in schools bring with them serious threats to children's education and to their psychological and physical well-being” (Molnar, Boninger, Harris, Libby, and Fogarty 2013 p25).

MORE ISSUES

- ▶ Marketing to children is an urgent ethical issue that needs to be addressed (Kunkel and Roberts 1991).
- ▶ Marketing to children promotes a number of negative social values, perhaps the most important of which is materialism (Achenreiner 1997; Buckingham 2007; Blazquez and Bonas 2013).
- ▶ “there is no ethical, moral, social, or spiritual justification for targeting children in advertising and marketing” (O’Brien 2011).

FINDINGS +

76% indicated a positive response to the scheme

- ▶ Benefits – ‘Better Milk than Coke’
- ▶ Nostalgia – feelings of wellbeing
- ▶ Philanthropy – giving back
- ▶ Public Relations - goodwill

FINDINGS NOT SO +

In spite of a generally positive public attitude towards the initiative, the research revealed some key concerns:

- ▶ Health benefits of milk
- ▶ Time taken out of curriculum
- ▶ Exclusion of some children
- ▶ Increase in commercial dependency
- ▶ Decrease in state's responsibility
- ▶ Socialising 'new consumers'
- ▶ Raising levels of obesity
- ▶ No School Policy
- ▶ Schools used as Marketing vehicles

DISCUSSION 1

- ▶ The extent to which Fonterra's branded product in schools suggests a high degree of institutional complicity and educational endorsement that privileges the commercial at the expense of the educational.
- ▶ Marketing in schools criticised for blurring the line between educational imperatives such as critical thinking and informed independent choice and the commercial motives of persuasion and influence.

DISCUSSION 2

- ▶ While there may be merit in developing reciprocal relationships with corporate partners, the extent to which schools become complicit in selling the attention of the kids in return for benefits to the company is an ethical issue that needs to be addressed
- ▶ The initiative highlights the tension between Corporate Social Responsibility and corporate commercial motivations and the ethics of using privileged access to impressionable 'consumers' to promote a particular product

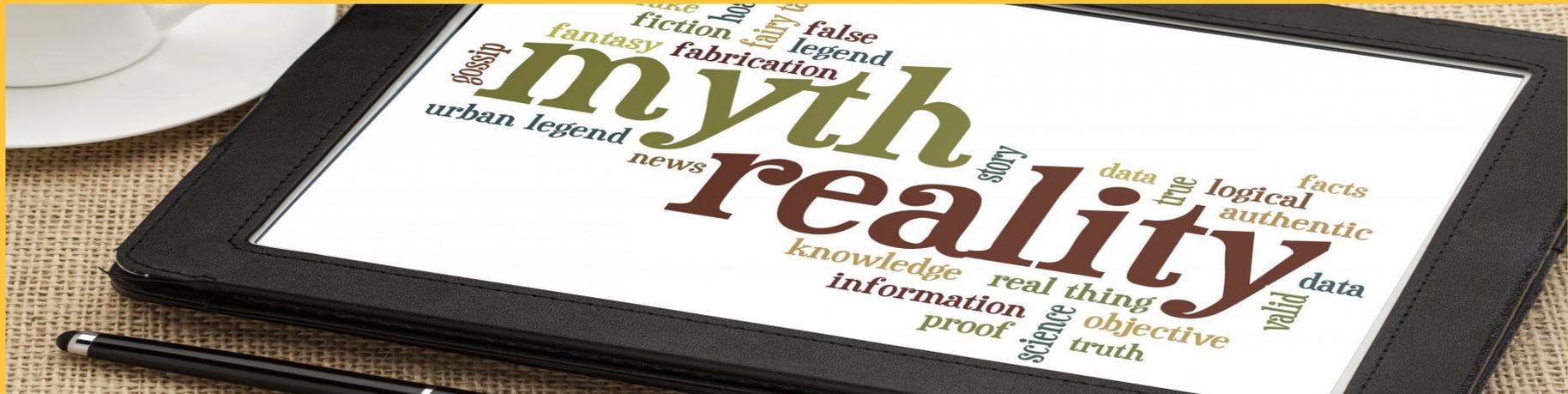
CONCLUSION

- ▶ Concerns regarding the ethics of commercial access to a captive group of vulnerable consumers.
 - ▶ NZ needs to review its policies around marketing in schools.
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Kids' Cam

Capturing the Commercial
World of NZ Children



The average American child watches between 25,000 to 40,000 advertisements on television per year (Holt, Ippolito, Desrochers and Kelley 2007)

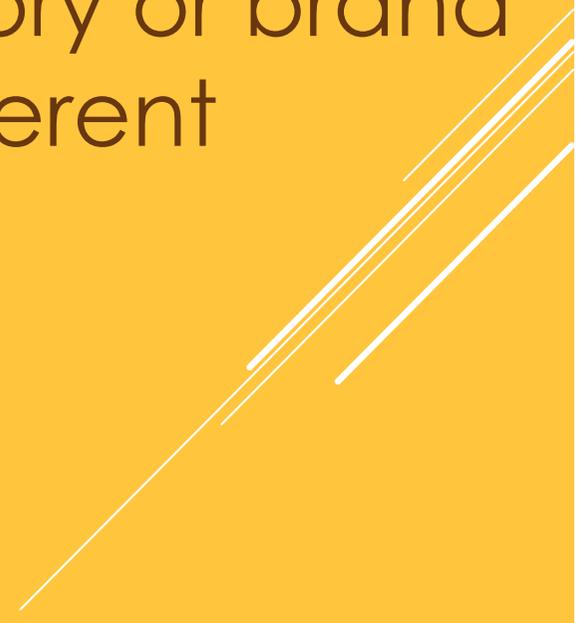
Adolescents (age 12-17) viewed an average of 13.2 food and beverage advertisements a day in 2004, 13.1 in 2007, and 16.2 in both 2010 and 2011 (Nielsen 2012)

Coca-Cola accounted for 15 percent of all product placements that occurred on TV and 70 percent of all placements viewed by children (Speers, Harris, & Schwartz's 2011)

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- ▶ In the rapidly changing marketing environment, research on the amount of advertising children and teenagers are exposed to is “woefully out of date and incomplete” (Common Sense Media 2014)
- ▶ There have been calls for new methodologies and more accurate metrics to quantify young peoples exposure to advertising (Kunkel & Castonguay 2012, Valkenburg and Peter 2013)

To date we have little evidence relating to exposure to the commercial world beyond television. In particular, little is known about the variety and nature of children's exposure at an aggregate level or at the product category or brand level, nor their exposure in different settings e.g. at school.



AUTOMATIC CAMERAS: SENSECAM

Developed by Microsoft Research, Cambridge, UK.

Have been used to document:

- ▶ active and sedentary travel behaviour in adults and young people (Kelly, Doherty, Berry, Hodges, Batterham and Foster 2011)
- ▶ The food purchasing and consumption habits of high school students on the journey to and from school (Matthews, Cowburn, Foster, Pearce, Nelson and Doherty 2011)
- ▶ Children's obesogenic environment (Barr, Signal, Jenkin and Smith 2014)





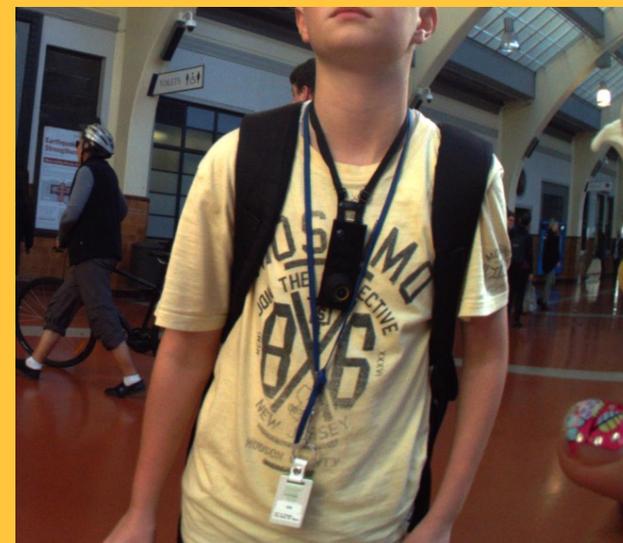
Branding Project

To examine the **frequency** and **nature** of children's **exposure** to marketing, documenting differences by setting, marketing medium, product category and source (brand), and exploring gender and socioeconomic differences.



METHOD

- ▶ 168 randomly selected Year 8 children from 16 Wellington schools
- ▶ Equal numbers by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status
- ▶ Wore a camera and GPS recorder for four days
 - ▶ Photo taken every 7 seconds
 - ▶ 1.3 million images
- ▶ Ethical approval



EXPOSURES

- ▶ Setting

Schools, homes, sports venues

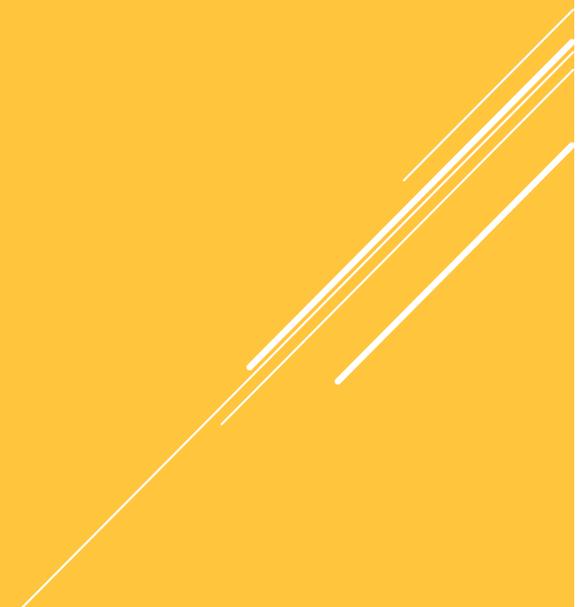
- ▶ Medium

Packaging, signs, screens
merchandise, print media, in-store

- ▶ Product categories

Food and beverage,
electronics, clothing

- ▶ Brand



November 2014

back

select all

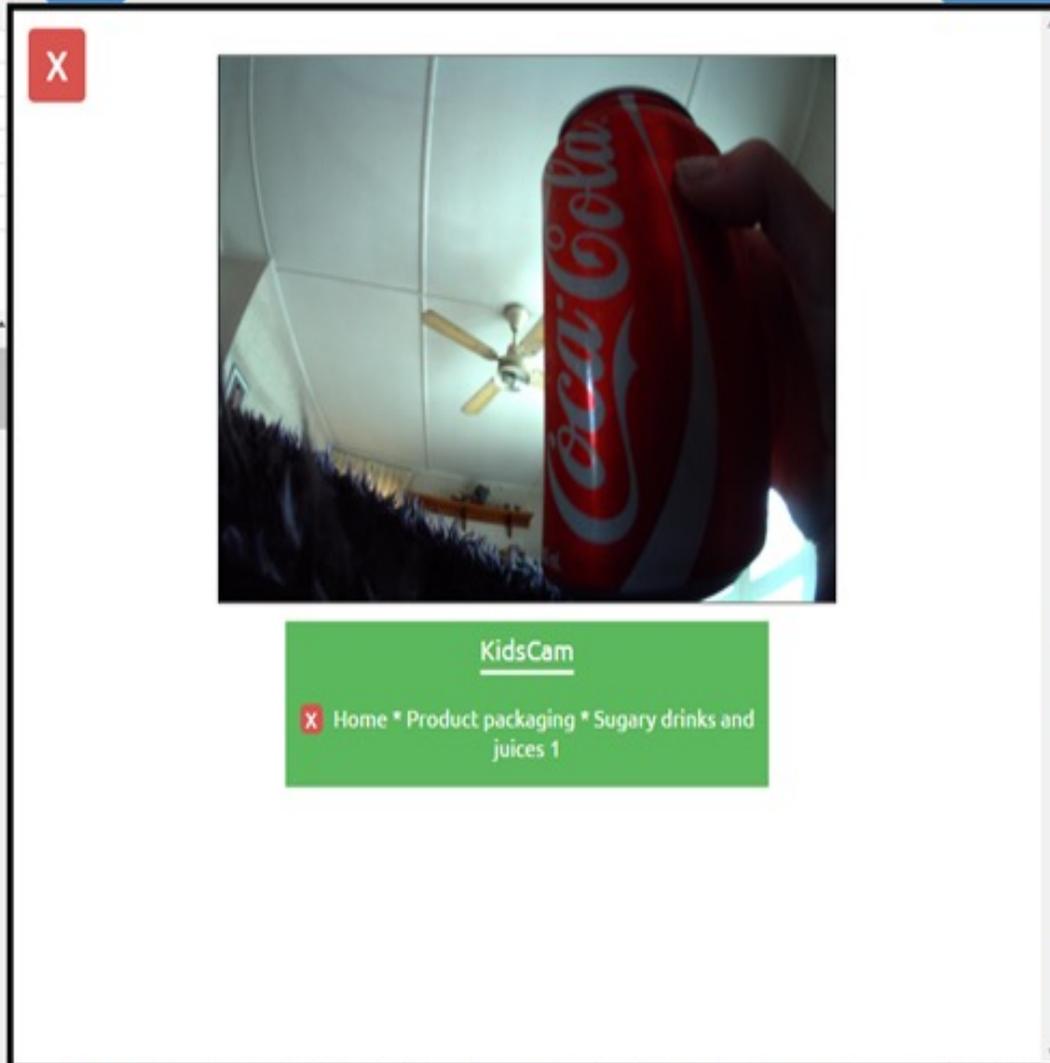
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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
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ontology

- Home ▲
- Default ▼
- Avallability ▼
- In-store marketing ▼
- Print media ▼
- Product packaging ▲
- Bakery 1
- Bakery 2+
- Cereal (unhealthy) 1
- Cereal (unhealthy) 2



14:55:16



14:55:33



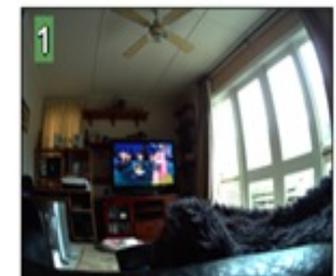
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Mobil



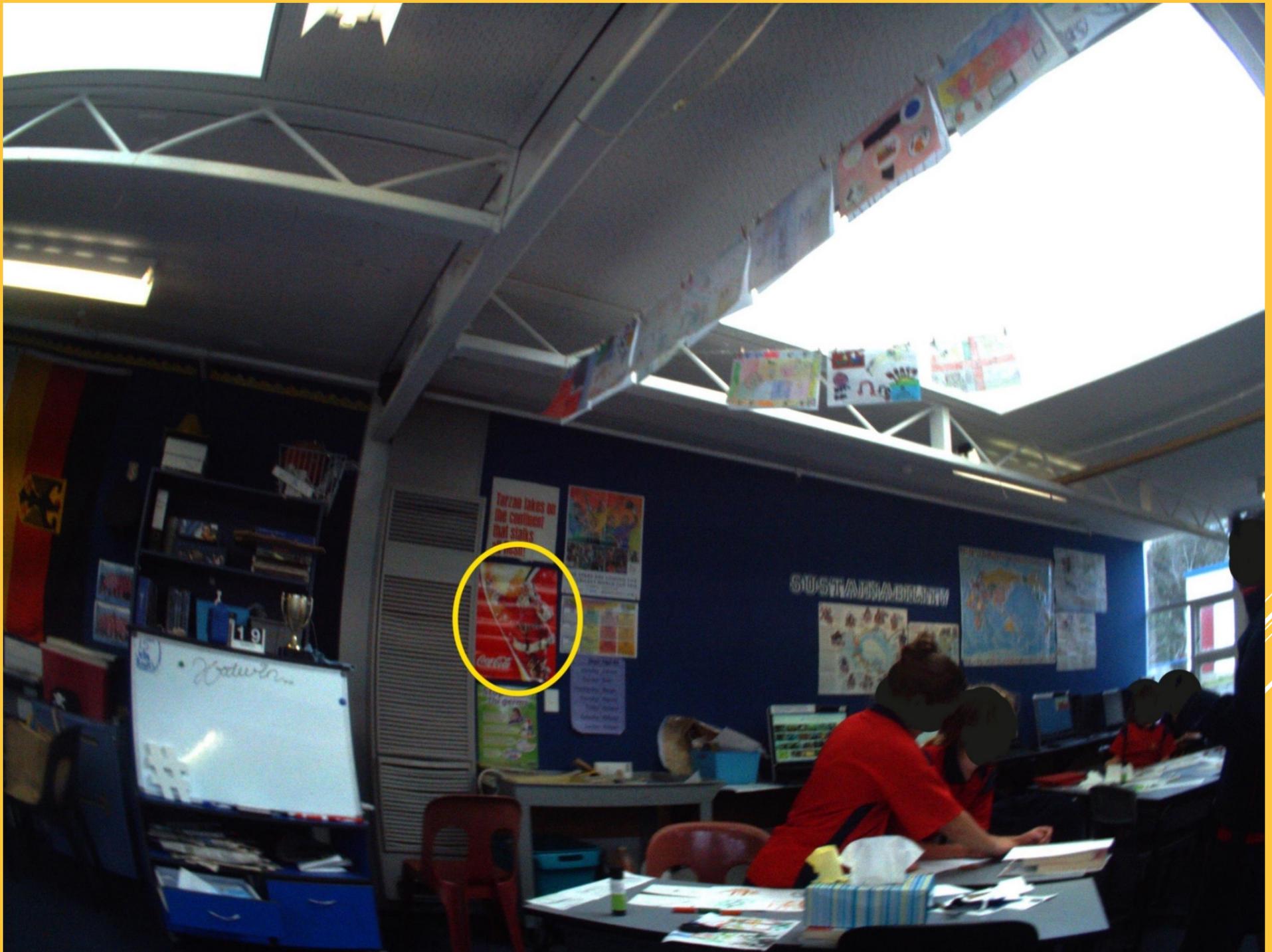
drive thru

synergy

synergy 1000

2.17







UNHEALTHY BRAND EXPOSURES

- Alcohol
- Gambling
- Smoking
- Unhealthy food/beverages



HEALTHY BRAND EXPOSURES

- Healthy food
- Social marketing messages



RESULTS

554



Majority in school (52%)

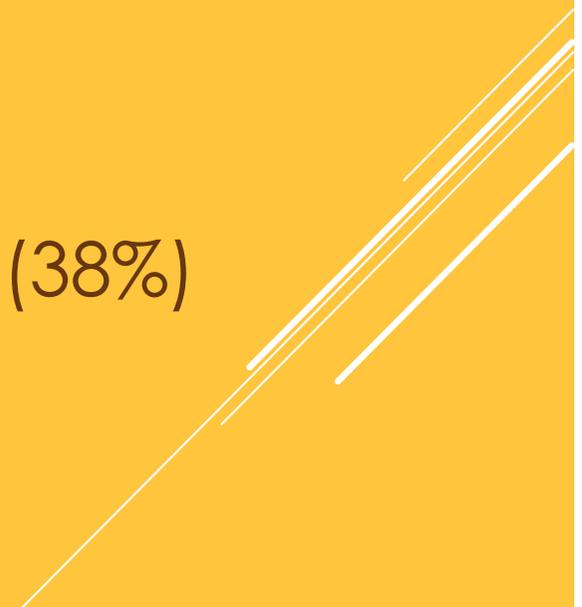
Product packaging (23%)

Home (20%)

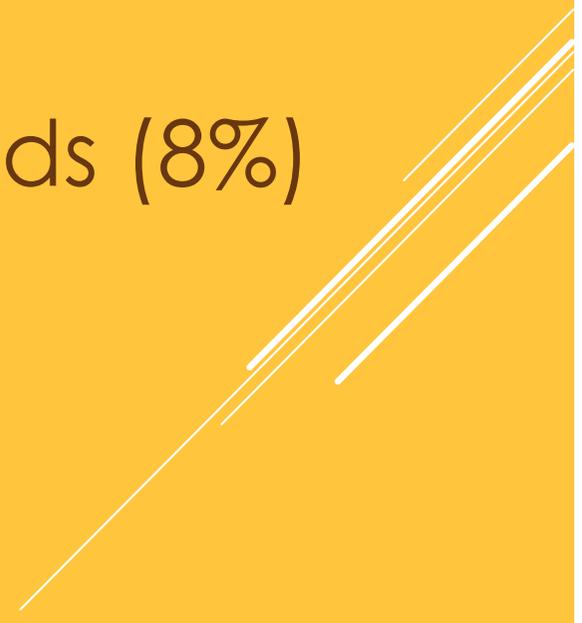
In-store (12%)

Brand labels most common medium (38%)

Signage (14%)



Most heavily advertised product categories:

1. Food and beverage (17%)
 2. Clothing brands (10%)
 3. Electronics/technology brands (8%)
 4. Websites/applications (8%)
- 

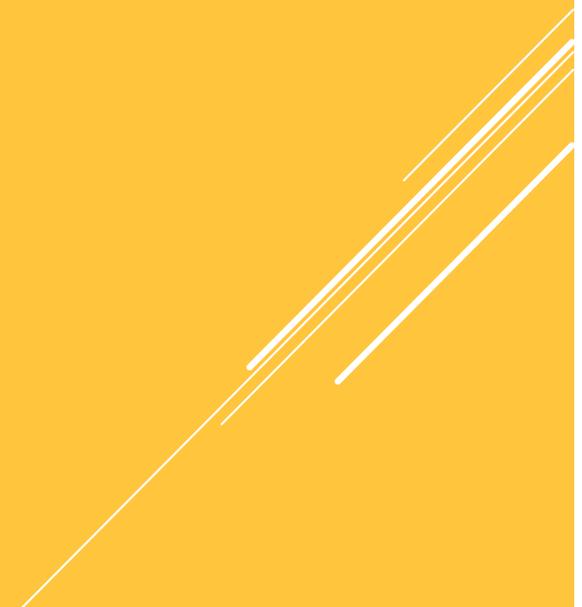
Most dominant brands:

Nike

Adidas

Macbook

Warwick



EARLY RESULTS

- ▶ Significant exposure to marketing in-school
- ▶ Tendency for most deprived children to be exposed to more marketing
- ▶ Males see more advertising than females
- ▶ The concentration of brands
- ▶ The presence of advertising in public spaces
- ▶ Children's exposure to harmful products and messages

LIMITATIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

- ▶ Cannot determine if a child is aware of the marketing in the image
- ▶ Decision to only code an image if 50% or more of a brand name or logo could be clearly seen is likely to underestimate the presence of marketing
- ▶ Screen exposure
- ▶ Enabled automated, objective observation of children's lived experiences in a wide range of settings, including home, school, in transport and the community
- ▶ Manual coding and analysis of such a body of data is a challenge
- ▶ Cameras collect data passively in real-time thus overcoming the recall bias and comprehension issues of survey research and reducing social desirability bias

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The UN Special Rapporteur (2014) recommends legislation be geared towards reducing the level of commercial advertising and marketing that people receive daily;

identifying spaces that should be completely or especially protected from commercial advertising, and,

ensuring space for a diversity of messages including not-for-profit and social marketing messages.

FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ▶ What are the relationships between socio-economic status, commercial exposure and aspects of children's well-being?
- ▶ What is the relative presence and nature of not-for-profit and social marketing messages in children's environments?
- ▶ How can we understand the concentration of advertising groups/brands and the key values they communicate to children?
- ▶ To what degree do we witness the presence of advertising in public spaces and children's exposure to harmful products and messages?
- ▶ What is happening on social media platforms e.g. tictok?

THANK YOU

Questions, Suggestions, Comments

