**CONSUMERISM: COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD**

# Introduction

Capitalism has consumerized not only us but the modern day embryo as well. Within a few seconds of birth a child becomes a consumer of the marketing industry. Consumerism of children is an important area that needs to be delved in order to define a better society for the future generation. This paper attempts to explore one of the darker side of capitalism which is consumerism of childhood. The analysis has been done with reference to the film Consuming Kids. The argument of this paper is based on the capitalist stance and effects on the modern day childhood stressing upon the gloominess of the marketing, advertising and media as it is affecting the societal glance upon children. For better understanding the paper has been divided into two sections. In the first section a detailed analysis of the mentioned issue is been done which follows a critical reflection on this grave issue.

# Marketing of the children

Children throughout the world are facing several issues due to the growing consumer culture and it is a matter of concern that as children they are unable to imbibe the factors which are harming them. The film Consuming Kids have well documented the fact how children between the ages 4 to 12 are noticeably been defined by their spending capacity (Šramová, 2014). Marketing strategies today focuses on the children as their major consumers. Youth today depends on the endless material messages that encourage their purchasing and consumption behavior (VODİNALI, 2016).

Children products and food have engaged more than the half of today’s consumer market. The enormous growth of such products can be considered to be an essential result of the popular culture that the children are part of. Different television shows that easily capture the mind of a child are been used as a marketing platform for different companies. On the other hand different products are introduced based on different television shows and characters. The complete children culture is drastically changing because of this phenomenon. Food and beverage companies like Coco-cola and McDonalds use American Idol, Star-Wars and other popular shows to promote their products ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2017). Different films and television shows are frequently used to promote different products. It has a direct impact on the human mind. If we consider the children aged between 6 to 14, they are the target of such influential commercial marketing. From breakfast cereals to lunch boxes, school bags and other merchandises are influencing the mind of kids.

If we consider the gender aspect then the girls and boys of a particular age group are being influenced in a different manner by different products. If we consider girls there is complete line of clothing and accessories based on popular characters starting from Disney princess to the most popular Barbie ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2017). Different television shows that depict the on goings of teenage life attract the children who have not yet reached adolescent, for example an expert has rightly stated that the popular American Teen magazine ‘Seventeen’ is not followed by this particular age group but chi8ldren below that age because necessarily the children mind work in a simple way- they want to experience the adolescence and similarly the adolescents want to experience the adult life.

This marketing policies and strategies also sets a gender role for the boys and the girls. While the boys are influenced by the action figures and weapon based toys like WWE, Star-wars and Power rangers action figures, the girls are taught to be docile, fashionable. These implications are overtly idealized through the dolls of proper shape and size dressed in high fashioned clothes. Such practices are increasing the commercialism of childhood which is often contradicting with the parent’s ideologies (Buijzen, Rozendaal & Van Reijmersdal, 2013).

Children are considered to be captive audience and the workings of the mind is well understood by the marketing designers, for examples infants are captivated by round figures and colorful images(Brusdal & Frønes, 2014). The television commercials that target the infants deliberately make use of such figures and colors that will captivate the little brains. The research personnel of the marketing and advertising even observe how many times a child blinks during a commercial, in order to decrease the rate of blinking they further develops commercials which are more colorful and mind capturing. According to a child expert in the mentioned films marketing has reached to such an extent that now the researchers conduct their studies based on how young girls are influenced and react to a shape, color and size of a particular health and beauty product. This study is used to develop a better packaging for the products which will make the products more tempting and captivating.

A study has shown that to fight the bad influence of Media, it is necessary to incorporate good influence of Media which includes several shows that claim to be useful for the development of a child’s brain. According to Michael Rich of Children’s Hospital, Boston these shows and games do not necessarily help in any kind of brain development ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2017). He further comments that their educational capacity and funds of knowledge do not depend on such things and he emphasizes on social interaction and parental bonding for their healthy brain development. Two year old children do not learn anything remarkable from an electronic screen rather hours of watching television affects their brain and their ability to learn also decrease. During the first two years of a child’s life the optimal development of brain is a sensitive issue and face to face interaction with other human beings helps in the creative development of a child and problem solving games are more effective than any virtual or brain developing educational software like Baby Einstein ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2017). This helps to teach the children to understand and realize the maternal bond of trust and faith. Creative play is a foundation of critical learning, creativity and active imagination.

# Dark side of consumer culture: a refection

Advertisement and marketing have direct associations with the problems that the children are facing today. Commercialism and consumerism have affected the imaginative and creative faculty of the children because for them it has become necessary to have merchandises and products to play. Marketing of different superhero merchandise and products are based on this strategy (Šramová, 2014).

More children are diagnosed with hypertension, diabetes, obesity and depression and this is because the society is treating the children as buy and power consumer. The idea of the a healthy child is been replaced by the consumer image of the child. But the advertising and marketing industry has put the whole responsibility on the parents. But the marketplace itself is influencing the minds of the parents and they are subjugated in such a manner that they consider these fancy products to be necessary for the children to be hyperactive and modern.

Another important issue is children aged between 4 to 12 are constantly viewed according to their spending capacity. Feminine ideal is been emerged in to the girls so that the marketers can sell them their complete line of clothing. Young minds are constantly being manipulated by the marketers to imbibe the endless material messages which encourage the consumption and purchasing behavior in order to impact their self-image. To maintain their constructed image they are buying the unnecessary products, accessories and merchandise just to meet the contemporary ultra modern image. A set of cunning and callous kids are being created just for the sake of marketing industry. The materialistic view and consumer culture are breeding narcissism among the youth. This culture is creating a bunch of people who are bothered more about the status symbol and self-interest. The sense of greater value is decreasing day by day especially in the youth.

Children today are under direct influence and exposure to hard advertisement and media. This is harming the natural growth and development of their minds and by the age of five they have already become brand sensitive. Children are deciding the brands for buying a car, a laptop or a phone. This has been identified meticulously by the advertisers and marketers and they are influencing the vulnerability of them. The vulnerability is being exploited by them in order to increase their profit.

# Conclusion

Advertising and marketing industry is harmful for the children because it directly influences their ability to thinkand also manipulates children’s views of the world. Young people are subjected particularly to the harm of the make believe world of virtual reality as they are vulnerable to social influences. External and internal regulations are necessary to control the areas of children’s lives from television commercials to toys, mobile apps and internet. To protect the future of the world it is necessary to take essential steps to control media activities in order to stop the consumerization of childhood.