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Final Year Research Project

"Does Advertising Influence the Consumption of Children's Toys and Video Games in Ireland?"

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence toy and game advertising exerts on children. My research is based on Irish children, both boys and girls, between the ages of 4 and 12. I chose to undertake this topic of research as I have a particular interest in advertising, its motives and resulting impact on particular social groups. The parent and child dynamic is interesting as we have all experienced it as children, and will go on to experience the other side of the coin, as parents, in the not so distant future. Through the conduction of 8 semi structured interviews with parents of children in this age group and observations carried out in a well known Irish toy store, the research explores the impact of advertising on the Irish child population and its respective parents. Through my research I found a gap in literature which I wished to fill. I found that previous studies regarding advertising and children have concentrated on just television advertising alone, with little attention given to other mediums. I feel that other methods of advertising along with social factors should be considered when studying children and advertising. As well as this, research concerning children and advertising in an Irish context is few and far between, I have come across studies of this nature based in various different countries, however Ireland is not one of them. Some of the themes this study aims to explore include:

- Which advertisement medium has the greatest impact on Irish children?
- Do different age groups react differently to advertisements?
- Does merchandise from films/ TV programmes and celebrity endorsed items appeal to the child population?
- Does advertising influence children's preference for over 18's video games?
- What pressures does advertising place on these children's parents?

According Casey et al "The purpose of advertising is quite straightforward: to persuade people to buy goods and services in a market economy" (2002:3). They go on to say that in western societies childhood as a concept is commonly understood to be a stage in the life course characterised by dependency and immaturity (2002:21) This 'vulnerable' stage in the life course may leave children open to manipulation by advertisers and more susceptible to the power of advertising. "Research in Britain by National Family and Parenting Institute 2004 found that 84% of parents believed their children were being targeted too much by advertisers and that this was a major problem they face trying to raise their kids". (Piachaud 2007:18) In recent times there has been interplay between toys, games and playing. "Toys, games and media are merging inexorably into a seamless blend of entertainment, information, education and play. Although traditional toys have not lost their appeal, technology is increasingly applied to the pursuit of pleasure". (Goldstein et al, 2004:1) They continue by stating that the convergence of media – print, television and films, computer games, toys and collectables occurs almost seamlessly, there is an apparent convergence between traditional toys and those mediated by digital technology.(2004:1-2) . According to the Oxford English Dictionary merchandise are "products used to promote a film, pop group, etc., or linked to a fictional character".(2013). Goldstein et al tells us that merchandising in the modern world is no longer a fleeting afterthought but an essential part of the commercial strategy, every 'text' which includes commodities such as toys draws on another text making children's culture exceptionally intertextual. (2004:2) 'Intertextuality' by definition is "The relations between media texts which affect the ways in which any one of the texts in question is understood" (Deacon et al, 2007:385). This Intertextuality is explained using Pokémon. "When children play with Pokémon cards or toys for example, they draw on knowledge and expertise they have derived from watching the TV shows and movies, or from playing the computer games.

Each play event is part of a broader flow of events which crosses from one medium of 'platform 'to another". (Goldstein et al, 2004:3)

In the following chapters I will be discussing the relevant literature and theories associated with this topic - research already done and gaps in such literature, I will be explaining the methodology used in my research and the final chapters will be detailing the findings revealed from data collected.

1. <u>Literature Review</u>

In the following I will discuss and analyse literature relating to my field of research, themes such as the commercialization of childhood, Child-directed advertising, the power of television, video gaming culture, the evolution of the advertising strategies and resulting consequences of target advertising on the respective parents.

<u>1.1 Games and Play:</u>

The activity of playing is "The freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child" (NCO, 2004:10) According to Brian Sutton Smith, "The predominant nature of play throughout history has been play with others, not play with objects". (1986:26) Times have definitely moved on since the writing of this, although children are still playing with others – they are now living in a material world where objects are necessary for play. "Throughout the last century the idealization of play became increasingly commodified" (Kline et al. 2003:243) Fleming has argued that "the toys children play with whether it be My Little Pony, Lego or Nintendo – help them make sense of their worlds and are essential to their development". (1996) In this study I will look at the advertising of children's toys and games. Cook explains that the recognition of the child consumer, is often mediated through parents can be seen in the advertising and marketing in a wide range of products, especially toys. (2009) "Research evidence indicates that exposure to advertisements can increase children's desire for products and may encourage them to ask their parents to make purchases on their behalf" (Bansal 2008:103). The whole issue of child directed advertising is clearly not only a "child thing" it has huge repercussions for the

respective parents. David Buckingham in his book "The Material Child" tells us that parents play a central role in children's engagements with consumer culture, most of children's spending is in fact parents spending – its parents who pay even if it's the child who's going to consume what they buy – children have an increasingly significant influence on family purchasing decisions. (2011:143). In this study I aim to investigate the issues faced by parents as a result of intensive child-directed advertising as well as the effects on the children themselves.

1.2 Children's Media Use:

In terms of media use in Ireland, research has been done on children's internet use by "EU Kids Online" which was a project using a random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged between 9-16 who use internet plus interviews with one of their parents. The study was conducted in 25 European countries in 2010. In an Irish context their research found that Internet use at home among Irish children was well above the European average at 87% vs. 62%. Irish children spend just over one hour online per day. They found high levels of parental mediation is reflected mostly in the setting of rules regarding internet use, for 91% of kids some form of restriction applied to their internet usage. In terms of what they actually use the internet for, the top three were doing school work (85%), playing games (83%) and watching video clips (76%). Neuborne in 2001 claimed that advertising is unavoidable on the internet. "Commercially sponsored websites containing games contest and promotions designed for children pervade the internet. Estimates suggest that 98% of children's sites now permit advertising and that more than 2/3's of websites designed for children rely on advertising as their primary revenue stream." (Cited in Moore, 2004:163)Although I couldn't find any similar evidence for the television viewing patterns of children in Ireland I did find article from 2011 which cited an American study of kid's television viewing patterns. "In 2009 Nielson Co reported that the average 2-5 year old child watch TV for more than 32

hours per week and kids between 6 and 8 spent 28 hours per week in front of the television. The Kaiser Family Foundation also conducted research on the media habits of children between the ages of 8 and 18 and they found that on average this age group spend about 4.5 hours per day watching television in various forms". (Uzoma, 2011).

1.3 Television:

There has of course been a plethora of research already done in the field of advertising and children, but I have discovered throughout the course of my reading, such research is concentrated in one particular medium of advertising, that being television advertising. Authors such as Pine & Nash (2002), Soni and Upadhyaya (2007), Robertson and Rossiter (1972), Bansal (2008), Buijzen & Valkenburg (2000) and Kunkel & Wilcox (2004) have all conducted research on children and advertising – however they all concentrate on television advertising, and none of them are based in Ireland. The other mediums of advertising have been ignored in their studies and I feel this is a gap that my research can fill. What about catalogue and print advertising? Advertising online? Marketing within toyshops? As Piachaud states "Advertising directed at children has increased in recent years – not merely traditional through magazines and TV commercials but increasingly linked to internet, product placement, commercial sponsorship and to movie spin-off's". (2007:6). There is no denying that television advertisements do have a significantly large impact on children, but I believe the other forms could be equally as influential. In Buijzen and Valkenburg article (2000) "The impact of TV advertising on children's Christmas wishes" they asked children to nominate their preferred Christmas gifts and compared requests to commercials that were broadcast in the period leading up to Christmas. 250 kids between the ages of 7 and 12 from an urban district of the Netherlands took part in the study. They sent out the questionnaire in early December and taped the commercials that appeared on two of the most popular

children's networks on a Saturday morning – 90% were about toys. Findings revealed that over half the children asked for at least one brand that had been advertised in the period of investigation. I thought that this was a quite effective methodology – The results seem to be reliable as a result of the research method incorporated. In 1972 Robertson and Rossiter conducted a field study on the "Short run advertising effects on kids", they used similar methodology and although it was conducted 30 years previous it yielded much the same results as Buijzen and Valkenburg. In 2002, yet another study was carried out by Pine & Nash entitled "Dear Santa: The effects of TV advertising on young children". A common trend seems to be developing in previous research, in that they all seem to be based around Christmas. This would make sense as in the run up to Christmas television is saturated with advertisements and commercials for toys and gifts, as I stated earlier Buijzen and Valkenbergs study found that 90% of commercials on a Saturday morning were advertising toys. (2000). Although an element of my research will be based around Christmas, my research will be taking place in Spring time so it my findings will be relatable all year round as opposed to previous studies which have concentrated solely on seasonal advertising. In Pine and Nash 2002, they used a similar yet slightly different method to the two previous studies. They interviewed 83 4.5-6.5 yr olds about the extent of their television viewing, they then analysed their letters to Santa. Results found that overall kids who watched more commercial TV were found to request a greater number and more branded toys. It also found a correlation between watching TV alone and the number of requests made, which rendered lone viewing children more susceptible to advertising. Pine and Nash used a novel method – they felt they overcame the limitations of earlier research by looking at a behaviour that many children engage with spontaneously – asking for toys in a letter to Santa. However I am not convinced, in the two previous studies I have analysed, the children were also asked to write down what they would like for Christmas. I don't think there were limitations to be overcome

as a child is a child, and if you ask them what they want for Christmas they will more than lightly tell you. Nevertheless analysing the letters was an interesting method, There may or may not have been more freedom in the writing. In this study they used a comparison group of 19 Swedish 6 year olds. Sweden was chosen as advertising to children is not permitted there, they were found to request significantly less items, however this may not be down to just television advertising.

1.4 Evolution of Advertising:

According to Piachaud the nature of advertising has changed – no longer restricted to toys but now encompasses a wide range of products. Everyday products such as toothbrushes and stationary are being turned into branded goods linked with toys in order to be sold to children. Merchandise from TV and film are huge business. E.g. products based around Tellitubies ran into hundreds of millions (2007:11) Pokémon is a prime example of this cross media merchandising directed at kids. David Buckingham did a study of Pokémon in 2003 entitled "Gotta catch 'em all". To say it was a marketing phenomenon that took the world by storm would be an understatement. In 1998 Pokémon was the top selling game boy game and card trading game, there were cartoons, Pokémon the movie and computer games. In 1999 the shops overflowed with Pokémon branded soft toys, clothes, posters, food, drink, bed linen, wallpaper, key rings and a myriad of other merchandise (2003:381) "A premium was placed on collecting both physical species within the texts (games, cartoon) and of the physical commodities (merchandise)". (Buckingham 2003:386) The commercial dimension of the Pokémon phenomenon according to Buckingham exerts familiar arguments that children are being economically 'exploited' (2003:392) but in reality it's the parents of these children who are out of pocket. Advertising and content have long been intertwined, Sarah Grimes in 2008 coined the term 'advergaming' which is the "online phenomenon wherein

advertising messages are embedded into the very fabric of digital games" (2008:162) She goes on to say that from the beginning children's media and marketing have shared a very close relationship. "By the 80's many children's TV shows had adopted the 'strawberry shortcake strategy' – product or character driven programming aimed at promoting a particular brand and related merchandise". (Engelhardt, 1986 cited in Grimes 2008:163). Grimes continues by saying that similar strategies have since appeared throughout children's industries, emerging within children's digital culture in a sort of media super system (1998:163). Millions can be made in revenue from popular children's characters and their associated merchandise, they are all interlinked, just look around you, any kids television show surely has an overabundance of consumer products associated with it. According to Kinder "This super system networks together various media texts and products constructed around a single popular character or group of characters or brand enabling them to cross reference and promote one another to a previously unimaginable extent".(1991) So what are the repercussions for parents? Soni and Upadhyaya conducted a study in 2007 entitled "Pester Power Effect of Advertising" which was based in India. Research was conducted through administered questionnaires and the sample was 100 school going kids and parents. Some of the findings revealed for 80% TV was the primary way kids learn about new products and brands and 50% of children admit to nagging when they want something. I have some issues with the methodology used, only 50 % of children admitted "nagging". Who is going to admit to nagging their parents in a door to door questionnaire? There is nothing personal about a door-to-door questionnaire, there is little chance of rapport to be developed between interviewer and participant, therefore they may feel under no obligation to answer truthfully. Therefore I feel the results may be quite inaccurate, an anonymous self-administered questionnaire or a face-to face interview would have produced a more reliable result.

1.5 Video Games:

In 2004, the National Children's Office commissioned research entitled "Play and Technology for children aged 4-12"; this research was conducted by Downey, Hayes and O'Neill. (2004) I found this interesting as not only was it based in an Irish context, but it was also exploring the same age group as I am. The study addresses "The kinds of technologies that are present in the everyday lives of children in Ireland today together with the principal patterns of usage and consumption of this technology and it place in children's day-to-day place behaviour" (2004) I took a particular interest in the video gaming section of this research project as it educated me in the field which I was going to delve into and gave some statistics which would be of benefit to my research findings later on. Their research sample was 292 children between the ages of 4 and 12 from 10 primary schools all over Ireland. To summarise, they found that ownership of media technology and console gaming appears to increase with age – however both genders and all ages said they played these games with boys appearing to play more than girls. The frequency and duration of play varies according to factors such as possession of a new game and the weather and three quarters of all children surveyed said there was a games console in their home. A finding which I found particularly interesting was with the issue of game censorship and over 18's video games. "All children said they had access to or even owned and 18 rated game that involves car theft and pimping as part of the scoring storyline. Although some borrowed games belonging to an older sibling or cousin, others said that the games were bought for them by a relative or parent". (2004). This is something I would like to explore in my own research, how is the purchase of over 18's games for young children negotiated by Irish parents? How do young children become aware of such games? A gap in this literature is that only the child's opinion was expressed, it does not educate us about the respective parent's opinions on these games. A study was

carried out by Joeckel and Sven in 2009 studying the appeal of unsuitable video games to children in Germany. Their empirical study revealed that the "preference for unsuitable video games is a widespread phenomenon among 8-12 year olds" – results show that about one in four children quoted their favourite game to be one not adequate for their age. They even mentioned games with age ratings 8 years older than their own ages. It was also confirmed that a gender related difference in the preference for unsuitable video games exists in regards to boys. Is this the case in an Irish context? Is it just the boys who are requesting games not suitable for their age or are the girls on par? Interesting research regarding the gender divide in gaming was carried out by Schott and Thomas in 2008 entitled "The impact of Nintendo 'for men' advertising campaign on a potential female market" it revealed that "the female gaming community may inhabit a presence both online and in educational contexts but findings showed that media advertising appears to occupy a much greater influence so much so that it had an ability to dampen the intrigue of potential consumers".(2009:51) These findings would suggest that the advertising of video games is largely gendered, but in the case of Irish children between the ages of 4 and 12 would the same be true, is video game advertising male-orientated or does it appeal to the girls too. Video Games are advertised largely through the medium of television, according to Kline, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter "TV ads become a central part of marketing programs, used simultaneously to develop a brand identity for the game maker and to communicate the attractions of the game play experience" (2003:224). They go on to say that these 30 second ads must catch consumer's attention in an engaging way to make interactive entertainment seem cool and deepen the viewer's involvement with the game. (2003:224) Television is one of the most successful means of advertising video games as according to video game advertisers "short of actually playing, the best way to get a feel for a game is watching it" (How Sega and Sony try get in your heads, 1998)

1.6 Catalogues

As you can see research in this field is saturated with television advertising and its influences, I did come across an article regarding toy catalogues however. It was entitled "Selling compromise: Toys, motherhood and the cultural deal" (Pugh 2005) The author examined the marketing of more than 3,500 toys in 11 mail order catalogues from 2000-2001 holiday season. She found that catalogues presented toys as solutions that would allow mothers to be good mothers without having to physically be there. (2005:729) These catalogues were however marketed to mothers rather than children. Skill building was a central motif of the catalogues, as was education and the acquisition of academic skills; some toys were also marketed promising the child would find companionship in it. (740-742) While this article was interesting, it differs greatly from the focus of my research which will be toy catalogues aimed at children.

Based on my review of existing literature I expect to find a significant link between children's choice of toys games and their exposure to the advertising of said items. While literature states that the medium of television is the top dog when it comes to children's consumer habits, I hypothesise that other forms of advertising will be highlighted as equally as influential. I also believe that cross-advertising and brand recognition will be prominent in my findings.

2. **Methodology**

My Main objective for this research project was to investigate the influence of advertising on Irish children between the ages of 4-12 and the resulting consequences on their parents. Advertising is an interesting topic, particularly the logic behind what makes a good advertisement that is attractive to kids, but also the domino effects on the parents who have to fund this consumption. In the tough economic times we are facing I was interested in getting a parents perspective on the huge business of child targeted marketing we find ourselves surrounded by.

2.1 Research Method:

In this study I used a multi-method approach. I used a combination of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods works at "delving into social complexities in order to truly explore and understand the interactions, processes, lived experiences, and belief systems that are part of individuals, institutions, cultural groups and even the everyday". (O' Leary 2010:114) I combined observation and semi structured interviews in a mixed method approach. I conducted my observations in an urban toy store in the run up to Christmas 2012. The social research method of observation is significantly different to what one would observe in everyday life. As Silverman tells us – "Social scientists do something extra with their observations: they write ethnographies...referring to social scientific writing about particular folks". (2001:45) In my observations I was looking out for the ways in which toys are marketed to kids in these superstores. I took field notes throughout the course of my observations. These observations focused on the public realm. In the public realm ethnographers "aim to observe how people in general behave in certain public contexts" (Silverman 2001:51) In this case the public context was a toy shop. I also conducted 8 semi-

structured interviews. These interviews were with the parents of children within the age group I'm studying which is 4-12. Through using semi structured interviews I went in with a list of themes I wished to cover but had the option to deviate from this (see Appendix 1). I asked questions based on their responses and also asked them to elaborate on things that came up in conversation throughout the course of the interview. "The advantage here is being able to come away with all the data you intended but also interesting and unexpected data that emerges". (O' Leary 20120:195) The fact that these interviews were face-to-face meant that they were more personal and I was gleaning more valid and reliable results. Times and dates were arranged and each interview took place in the participants own home, at their discretion. I conversed with the participants about normal everyday things prior to the interviews so that they were comfortable in my company, by doing this I felt they opened up more and were more at ease when answering my questions. (See example interview transcript Appendix 2). What followed was more of a flowing conversation rather than an interview which was exactly what I was looking for. Having said that one of my interview participants was quite reserved and reticent and had a tendency to answer in just words or short sentences without really elaborating, but I sensed this was just down to their personality type as opposed to anything else. I chose qualitative methods as I felt they held the greatest benefit to my research, I felt quantitative methods would be unsuitable for this type of research and were too restrictive. Although surveys are time efficient and allow you to reach large groups of people I felt they had no place in this research project. Surveying by definition is "The process of collecting data by asking a range of individuals the same questions related to their characteristics, attributes, how they live, or their opinions through questionnaire". (O' Leary 2009:181) This method would not have been beneficial to my research as there is no room for explanation or elaboration within surveying, I needed rich in-depth data.

2.2 Sampling:

When it comes to sampling I used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling. My research required the recruitment of a particular group in society, that being the parents of children between the ages of 4 & 12. Purposive sampling can also be referred to as "handpicked" sampling according O' Leary. This kind of sampling involves "the selection of a sample with a particular purpose in mind" (2010:170) In the case of my interviews it was the parents of children between the ages of 4 and 12, both male and female. Once I recruited one participant I then moved on to snowball sampling which is based on referrals. Snowballing by definition is "Once an initial respondent is identified, you ask him or her to identify others who meet the study criteria. Each of these individuals are then asked for further recommendations". (O'Leary 2010:170). I started off with a friend of the family; I purposely picked her, not only because the snowball had to start somewhere so to speak, but also because I knew her and it made the first interview easier. I was able to adjust questions and themes accordingly where problems arose and also add in some more where necessary, I suppose you could describe it as a pilot study, a run through. She then referred me one of her friends with children of similar age and so the snowball commenced. My experience with the first respondent made the following 7 interviews a lot easier, I was a lot more at ease and my confidence was boosted, which was good considering I didn't personally know the other respondents. I got both male and female participants and as it turned out it terms of their marital statuses, they were all married. In the case of the site selection for observation, this was through purposive sampling; I picked an urban toy store. My reasoning behind picking urban over rural was that there is generally a larger flow of customers and the stores are bigger. The more consistent flow of customers and the timing of my research which was a few days before Christmas 2012 meant there was more for me to observe, further enriching my study and field notes.

2.3 Ethics:

Abiding by ethics is of vital importance in any research project. I considered a number of ethical issues in the planning and undertaking of this project. I obtained informed consent – both verbal and written from all interview participants in this research study. According to O' Leary Informed consent implies that the participants are competent (have reasonable intellectual capacity), autonomous (They are making self-determined choices), they are involved voluntarily, they are aware of their right to discontinue, they are not deceived and know the full intended use of the study, they are not coerced or induced. (2010:41). I got every participant to sign and date a consent form (See appendix 3). Some of the elements outlined on the consent forms included – an explanation of who I was and what the project entailed, a request to record the conversation, a statement that no risks were involved with participating in the project, the benefits of taking part in the study and that the confidentiality and wellbeing of the participant would be my primary concern. They were also informed that they were free to terminate the interview at any time and did not have to answer questions if they did not wish to. Throughout the course of my research I ensured the confidentiality of the participants involved. I did this by using pseudonyms and leaving out obvious identifiers such as locations etc in my final report. The ethical issues involved with my observations were a bit more complex that of the interviews. The observation took in a public realm – a toy shop, however I felt both verbal and written consent from a gatekeeper was required, in this case the manager of the toy shop. A gatekeeper according to Silverman is "Some who is able to grant or deny access to the field". (2010:402). He dually signed a consent form which explained the research project (See Appendix 4). He had no qualms with me conducting the research in the toy store, on the condition I did not mention the name of the actual shop in my final project, which I adhered to. My observations were fully overt and candid; if anybody asked me what I was doing I had no problem explaining my research project to them. As

precaution I had consent forms on hand should anybody enquire or express concern, I was also willing to put my field notes away should anybody have a problem with me observing them. Luckily I encountered no such issues; my presence was barely noticed in the hectic toy superstore. I am ensuring that all research data is kept in a safe place and only used for its intended purpose. After I transcribed my interviews I deleted the recordings from the Dictaphone to ensure confidentiality. All transcripts and field notes have been saved on my password protected laptop. I also have back up files saved on an external hard drive which is also password protected. As regards the ethical issues surrounding causing harm in the field of study, I did my upmost to ensure the dignity and well being of the respondents. As I previously mentioned, in my consent forms I included that participants were free to terminate the interview at any time and for any reason, they were also under no obligation to answer questions if they did not wish to.

2.4 Analysis of data

According to O'Leary "Qualitative data analysis (QDA) creates new understandings by exploring and interpreting complex data from sources such as interviews, group discussions, observation, journals, archival documents etc., without the use of quantification." (2009:277) After my interviews I listened back to all recordings a few times and transcribed the conversations as Microsoft word documents. I also typed up my field notes from my observations as they were quite messy. The goal of data analysis is to move from raw data to rich theoretical understanding according to O'Leary (2009:262). I went through a process of reading and rereading all transcript data and did my analysis manually. I chose not to use any QDA software. I followed O' Leary's guidelines in my analysis which included "identifying biases and noting impressions; reducing, organising and coding; searching for patterns and interconnections; mapping and building themes; building and verifying theories; and drawing conclusions." (2009:277)

2.5 Limitations

As there was such a small sample used in this project the findings are not generalizable to the population as a whole. 'Generalizability' according to O'Leary is "Whether findings and/or conclusions from a sample, setting or group are directly applicable to a larger population, a different setting, or to another group". (2010:43) My main objective was to get in-depth qualitative data as opposed to large scale generalizable findings. I believe the data generated in this study to be reliable and valid. Validity according to O'Leary is concerned with truth value "considers whether methods, approaches and techniques actually relate to what is being explored". (2010:43). She goes on to explain reliability as "concerned with internal consistency, i.e. whether data/results collected, measured or generated are under the same repeated trials". I believe my study to be reliable and valid for a number of reasons. I was professional and systematic in my sampling, methodology and analysis of data. I entered my subject fields with an open mind, of course I had expectations for what my research should discover, however I left all prejudice behind me while conducting my interviews so as not to interfere with the research subjects opinions/beliefs. My interview subjects we picked because they fitted the criteria of what I required for this study, parents of children between the ages of 4 and 12. Only one of these interview participants were handpicked, the rest were recruited through snowball sampling. I feel that if others were to conduct research in this field using similar methodology they would find comparable results, this is known as reproducibility. "Reproducibility is concerned with whether results/conclusions would be supported if the same methodology was used in a different study with the same/similar context." (O'Leary, 20010:43) Further research could be conducted in this field on a larger scale to produce more generalizable findings.

3. <u>Research Findings:</u>

Note:

* Indicates pseudonym

*Cobra = a major toy superstore

*Savers = A large grocery store with a toy section

Findings revealed that advertising of toys and video games exerts a huge influence in Ireland, however not on all children as a whole. My research found that certain age groups and genders are more vulnerable to the powers of advertising than others. The age group that advertising seems to have the greatest impact is the 6-8 year old bracket, with parents claiming girls to be particularly affected. According to Calvert "Newer marketing approaches have led to online advertising and to so-called stealth marketing techniques, such as embedding products in the program content in films, online, and in video games..... All these marketing strategies make children younger than eight especially vulnerable because they lack the cognitive skills to understand the persuasive intent of television and online advertisements". (2008:205)

Mary*homemaker, 3 girls (2, 7&12) 1 boy (10) noticed a clear difference in her children's reactions to advertising.

> "The 7 year old girl would be most influenced by advertising. The others are older and they'd prefer to see what their friends have more so. They are more influenced by their friends or relations".

Lisa* teacher, 2 girls (6&8), 2 boys (9&11), also identified her girls as being the most susceptible

"I think the girls would be very influenced by the ads on television, the younger ones, their 6 and 8, they would be constantly calling me in drawing my attention to something [on the television] and they would pause it so they could show it to me. Ya the two girls especially, the older boys not so much, whether it's their age or what I don't know".

Jane*civil servant, 2 boys (7&10) seems to think advertising is more directed at girls than boys.

"No I feel that with boys advertising wouldn't have as much influence as with the girls, they're not as much into pop stars or celebrities, or the whole lot, they know what they want".

As regards television advertising, my research found that parents identified the weeks leading up to Christmas as one of the main times TV advertising exerts its power. This is in keeping with previous research conducted by Buijzen and Valkenberg (2000) for example, in the run up to Christmas they taped the commercials that appeared on two of the most popular children's networks on a Saturday morning and found that 90% of them were about toys.

Cathy*, homemaker, 2 girls (7&9) 1 boy (4) notices TV advertising has a particular season al effect on her kids

"Yes especially around Christmas because every advert, every second one is advertising toys and games. They seem to put the adverts on during the children's programmes so when they are watching their shows they always see the adverts".

Maura*, Clerk, 1 boy (8) & 1 girl (5) thinks that everything is being over advertised to kids, it's no longer just the toys.

"Television advertising? Big-time yes. Like even just basic stuff like shoes for kids – Lelly Kelly's, that kind of thing they have toys in them, ya know there's toys in the shoes or you get make-up free with the boots, Moshlings, Bin weevils, magazines advertised on TV, everything, so everything is then wanted... I suppose they start talking about them a good bit. They'd absolutely remember them and then the next time they're in a shop their like drawn to it straight away".

What Maura* explained in the last quotation has been explored by Piachaud "The nature of advertising has changed: it is no longer restricted to toys but now encompasses a wide range of products and increasing advertising is being directed at younger age groups. Everyday products such as toothbrushes and stationery are being turned into branded goods linked with toys in order to be sold to children". (2007:11)

In terms of television viewing, my findings indicate that Irish children watch significantly less television than their American counterparts. American Research findings which stated that "kids between the ages of 6 and 8 spent 28 hours per week in front of the television". (Uzoma, 2011.)

Mary*, homemaker, 3 girls (2, 7 & 12) 1 boy (10) stated that

"During the week it would be about 2 hours per day and the weekend could be 5 hours a day".

Maura*, clerk, 1 boy (8) & 1 girl (5) had much the same to say regarding her children's viewing habits

"Every day I would say, an hour and a half and at weekends that could be up to 5 hours a day realistically".

One of the most interesting findings in my research was the exposure of the toy catalogue as a major influential marketing device. I noticed this gap in literature early in my research; previous studies seem to have overlooked the toy catalogue in favour of television and online advertising. I don't know if it is just in an Irish context the toy catalogue holds such high esteem, but certainly all parents I interviewed said the toy catalogue was a very powerful advertising method when it came to children's choice of toys and games.

Jane*, civil servant, 2 boys (7&10) compares the toy catalogue to a bible in her home

> "What happens here in this house is the Cobra* catalogue comes in the door in September and that is studied like a bible, more so they go through that with a fine tooth comb than watching the ads, or they would watch the ads but they would not highlight things. Catalogues I think are the most influential it's studied better than any school book, bible, whatever you want to call it. Going through it and through it and the list is being compiled from September to early December".

Cathy*, homemaker, 2 girls (7&9) boy (4), thinks the toy catalogue largely seasonal:

> "The toy catalogue comes in the door as I subscribe to it every Christmas and to stop fighting I actually go out and get two more copies so they can have one each to keep the peace. Again it would be 'I want that', 'I want that', 'I want that', but it's for 5 minutes or whatever. They only look at them around Christmas time; we don't get them any other time of the year. It would entertain them for hours when they first come in the door but after a while forget about it".

Maura*, clerk, 1 boy (8) and 1 girl (5)

> "Mmmm yes, Cobra* catalogue comes and it's like a phonebook battered like a 10 year old phone book it's like gone through, gone through, gone through. The one does

the pair of them because she's (5) not as bad. The 8 year old is extremely influenced. He's obsessive about stuff and will live, breathe, think everything he does is about characters. He cuts them out, he draws them out, drawings he does he sticks them on his wall it's like worship. He could have a hundred drawings of the same character doing different things ya know. It's incredible".

Michael* Electrician, Boy (12) and Girl (8) says the toy catalogue is a regular feature on the kitchen table

"Yes particularly at Christmas time. The toy catalogue is nearly like the Santa Claus menu and is looked at regularly before a final list is decided upon".

A strong link between television programmes/characters and associated merchandise was found in my research. Kinder refers to it as a 'super system' which "networks together various media texts and products constructed around a single popular character or group of characters or brand enabling them to cross reference and promote one another to a previously unimaginable extent". (1991)

Maura*, clerk, boy (8) and girl (5) says her 8 year old is 'obsessed' with characters.

[Re- does merchandise from TV programmes/films appeal to your kids] "Yes most definitely, just say the 8 year old at the moment, he's into "the diary of a wimpy kid", he's into the series of books of that so he had to get the DVD, he's constantly researching it and he gets obsessed with the little characters then and things and he has to get them all, and the figurines, oh my god its crazy like, it's like nuts, its obsessive, they get very obsessive".

Lisa* teacher, mother of 4 thinks that because her 11 year old son is slightly autistic he is more susceptible to the power of advertising and merchandising.

> "Well for 3 out of the 4 children I don't think it [merchandise] would make a difference. It might make a difference to the oldest one. He's slightly autistic so he swallows information, he's more impressionable. He's easily influenced and led than the others because he would watch a lot of say WWE on the television, and last summer when we were on holidays he was all about it, he wanted all the memorabilia and all the stuff associated with it".

Mary* mother of 4 doesn't think merchandise appeals to any of her kids except the middle child

> "Maybe the 7 year old girl with Victorious, with the dolls and that maybe if there was a corresponding doll".

Cross-media advertising was very evident in the toy store I visited as part of my observations. They had specially dedicated 'character aisles' in the store. We're talking Spiderman, the Hulk, SpongeBob Square pants, Scobey doo, Hello Kitty, Toy story, Peppa Pig, Mickey Mouse, Disney Princesses, Dora the Explorer, Victorious, Pirates of the Caribbean, Hannah Montana and all their associated merchandise all there, together. So for example if you come to the Toystory section of the character aisle, there's everything from Buzz Lighyear to the evil teddy bear to Mr Potato Head, dress up costumes, books, DVDs, soft toys, talking toys, board games, play sets, ps3 and Xbox games, everything you could think of bearing he toy story brand is there all together, for your convenience. The same is true of every other character/programme in the character aisle.

In relation to internet my research found that for the most part internet was used for games, YouTube etc. This is similar to the findings of the "EU Kids Online" survey in Ireland which found that "In terms of what they actually use the internet for, the top three were, doing school work (87%) playing games (83%) and watching video clips (76%)".(2010)

Jane*, civil servant, mother of two boys says that

> "A lot of their internet use would be for games, especially the younger one(7) – moshi monsters, Bin weevils, Movie planet – he's more so on games than the older one who's 10 would be using YouTube sites, listening to music and things like that. They would both be going into the toyshop sites as well. They would be updating themselves more really, rather than calling me into it, they would tell me where I can look them up if I need to do any more checking on it".

In my findings it was apparent that there was a prominent link between internet usage and collectable toys and trading cards. David Buckingham discusses this element in his study of Pokémon and its 'portability'. The portability of Pokémon is "the ways in which it can be transferred between media and between social contexts...children may watch the television cartoon, for example, as a way of gathering knowledge that they can later utilize in playing the computer game or in trading cards or vice versa". (2003:388) In my study I found Pokémon being replaced by such brands as 'match attack', 'bin weevils' & 'moshlings' being mentioned over and over again.

Mary*homemaker, mother of 4 says her son would use the internet the most in their home

> "My 10 year old boy would [use the internet] for anything to do with soccer, he's into match attack cards, collectables. He'd get them in pack ya know you can buy them or you can get them with the match of the day magazine and if he is near the end of the

collection he'd go on the internet, if there was a few he was short of then a few times we've bought them on the internet. You'd pay a lot less because some of the cards might be only 9 pence. He usually gets repeats in the packs but you can pick which ones you want on the website. So it's to avoid buying a load of packs I suppose".

Claire*, retail, 3 boys (11, 8, 5) comments that the kids magazines and trading cards often lead them on to the internet.

"They mostly play games on the internet but they like bin weevils, if they saw the comics and the comic might have cards that might give them hints so they might go back on the internet and get extra credit. They would kind of trade them but the cards might have 200 dosh or something then they go online and put it into the game and then they could maybe buy things for their room in bin weevils".

In my own observations in the toy store I noted the strong presence of collectable toys and trading cards. When I was conducting my observations before Christmas "Skylanders" was obviously a big thing, I now understand it to be a game in which you have to purchase different packs to progress, you buy the physical Skylanders 'toy', place it on a 'portal of power' and it transports itself into a video game, game data is saved on the toy and you can use it on any console. So it's a collectable. In the doorway of this particular toy shop, the first thing you encounter was a huge "Skylanders Giants" display, there was huge emphasis on it, it was impossible to avoid. There was wii and ps3 games, Skylanders figurines, different packs – 'starter pack', 'booster pack' and so on, there was even a Skylanders interactive demo game right there as you walked it the door. Beside every till there was an arrays of packages, almost all I have heard mentioned throughout my interviews – Match attack trading cards, WWE cards, sports star micro figurines, Pokémon trading cards, power rangers,

moshi-monsters – but to name a few. The location of the collectables in the toy shops is key to their sale. They are easily found by those looking for them, and for those children not yet aware of them they have plenty of time to investigate such gimmicks while waiting in the queue with their parents.

An interesting point which emerged from my research is that it appears to be a 'boy thing', this tradition of collecting and trading cards etc, in my research none of the girls were noted to be involved with this kind of collecting and trading system. Also there is an element of exploitation linked with the trading card phenomenon. In relation to Pokémon once again Buckingham explores how familiar arguments claim that children are being economically exploited when you take account of the amount of money which changes hands in the attempt to accumulate 'rare' cards. "Rare cards, particularly those with shiny holofoils can only be found in expensive 'booster' packs and the rarest cards are very infrequently included". (2003:392)

Maura*, homemaker

> "He'd have a massive collection of moshlings and their everywhere in the house, he had them in school today and he'd be trading them, he'd have these collectable cards, they're like football ones but they'd have monsters and cartoon characters on them"........ "Ben* (8) would be saying 'now we have to choose wisely, it might not be the one I want'. They often repeat themselves and then there are the rare ones, but they're in a sealed wrapper so you don't know what you're getting when you buy it so you have to keep buying them to get the ones you want. You might have 6of one and then none of the one you actually want".

Michael*, electrician, seems relieved that the days of trading cards are behind them.

"For a period the oldest boy (12) went through a stage of collecting match attack football cards. After about a year he stopped but by that stage we had hundreds of them and all the associated folders, collectable tins etc".

Through my research I have found that video games made an appearance in all households interviewed. This sounds about right, as in Downey, Hayes and O'Neill's study they found that in Ireland "three quarters of all children surveyed said there was a games console in their home". (2004)

Lisa* Teacher, 2 boys (11&9) and 2 girls (6&8) says her oldest boy is avid video game player

"They have handheld games, PSP and Nintendo DS, they have one each. We have an Xbox; the eldest boy at the weekends is almost completely addicted to video games, first thing in the morning. They only have a couple of games that came with the Xbox".

Cathy* homemaker, 2 girls (7, 9) and boy (4) says that her kids honestly don't have much interest in video games, her girls have a wii but it doesn't get played too often.

"They have the wii; they have 2 Mario kart games and 4 games altogether".

The responses from these two parents are very different, and it was something I noticed across the board in all my interviews. In terms of the children concerned in this research, the boys had far more interest in video games than the girls and played much more frequently. This has me wondering is it something to do with the advertising of said video games? A study by Schott and Thomas in 2008 on "the impact of Nintendo's 'for men' advertising campaign on a potential female market" revealed that video game advertising is largely male orientated. Elements like this may or may not be the reason behind the girls lack of interest in

video gaming culture, Again I may remind you that my sample is small, and so in no way generalizable to the population as a whole.

In terms of the type of video games children play, I found a large proportion of parents mentioning how their young boys pestered them for video games not suitable for their age group. Previous NCO research done in Ireland with children between the ages of 4-12 by Downey, Hayes and O'Neill found that of the children interviewed "All children said that they had access to or even owned an 18 rated game .... Although some borrowed games belonging to an older sibling or cousin, others said that the games were bought for them by a relative or parent". (2004) However an interesting point is that in my research all of the parents I spoke to were opposed their children playing these games and refused to buy them.

Jane*, civil servant, 2 boys (7&10) says there is regular conflict in the house regarding 18's video games

> "There's pressure on with the games as regards the over 18's games and these war games and call of duty etc, like some houses they go to their counterparts of the same age, have the games, they have it and they can play it. I don't allow them here and it's like as if to say what's wrong with you my school friend of the same age has them and he plays them and how come I can't have it. That's the type of argument we would have over them. They become aware of them from their friends and from advertising on television"......."There are 18 stamps on it for a reason yet you expect to allowed get it at 11. And then obviously when it's in the house you can't stop your 7 or 8 year old playing it".

Maura*, clerk, says her 8 year old boy plays over 18's games in friend's house, but she doesn't allow them in her home

"Oh ya, in a friend's house they are playing over 18's modern warfare and he wanted Santy to bring it to him and I just said no, and even the James Bond movie that's out, I think it's for over 15's or something, he wants to get it and I have to say no. It would be from his friends that he's see it, and he'd be saying 'well they all have it', but he's only 8 like".

In the toy store where I did my observations there was a large games area, with many demos of different games for kids (and adults alike) to try out. There were poster boards showing the top chart of video games and advertising various popular games. There was a huge cardboard display advertising "call of duty black ops 2" which is the over 18's game that many parents were making reference to in the interviews. Should it really have such a large, appealing advertisement in a toy shop? I mean the majority of "children" who will see it, will not be old enough to play it or buy it, which may make it all the more appealing to them. A study carried out by Joeckel and Sven in 2009 on the appeal of unsuitable video games to children in Germany proved "results show that one in four children quoted a favourite game named a title that was not adequate for their age". (2009) Although parents mentioned peers of similar age having the games as the influence, I'm sure advertisements like that in the toyshop or on the television don't help matters either.

As Michael* electrician with 12 year old son states

"He becomes aware of it from advertising, and from his peers"

As regards in-store advertising, there is little published research done on this. I however conducted my own observations in a toy store for the purpose of my research. As my observations took place the week before Christmas on a Saturday morning there were more parents than children present. Frantic parents on their phones, making phone calls, taking photos and pushing large trolleys of items. Some of the conversations I overhead were along

the lines of "It's way smaller than I thought will I still get it?"....... "What do you think will I get him something else" ...."What's she into, I don't want to get her something too babyish"...." it's quite expensive for what's in it isn't it?" ..."oh god I forgot about her, should I get her something different" etc. There were not many children present, as with the timing of the research, but the kids I did observe were of three different spectrums –either having a screaming tantrum, running wild with excitement or quietly playing/looking at something. However the lack of kids in the toyshop may not have just been down to just timing as my interviews revealed that many parents don't bring their children to the toy store.

Maura*clerk, boy (8) and girl (5) says that she can never bring her son near a toyshop.

> "She's alright but bringing him to town is like a battle and you know you're going to lose and spend €10 or more than you'd spend if you'd left him at home....... I never bring him to a toyshop, maybe once a year. Savers*, I don't even shop there because I can't like. It's too stressful; it's easier not to bring him. The younger girl is fine, its more clothes she'd want".

Lisa*teacher, 2 boys (9&11), 2 girls (6&8) says her youngest children are hardest to bring shopping

> "We'd go [to the toyshop] just for their own birthdays or if they're going to a birthday party. I try to leave them at home because they do put pressure on me when I bring them. It's a stressful experience they just want everything they see. I would stand my ground generally. The two younger girls would want virtually everything in the shop, but the two older boys would be more inclined to video games now."

Cathy* homemaker, girls (9&7) and Boy (4) says the experience isn't as stressful as they get older

"We'd go at Christmastime or kids birthdays. At Christmas I like to go alone but for their friends birthdays I would let them come and pick out what their friends would want. It's stressful enough, ah well it was, but it isn't really anymore. They're that bit older and understand that they can't have everything. The youngest hasn't been to the stage yet where I'm bringing him to the toyshop to get his friends presents as he's not started school yet so ya. It's not stressful coz I don't really bring them. I'm mean!! Kids in toyshops do scream, mine have done it in the past and I have given in and got cheaper versions of things to keep them quiet but it depends on the price".

According to Bonner in his studies of child rearing and the rural versus urban debate "popular culture, survey research and traditional sociological literature all appear to present wide support for the validity of the claim that it is 'better' to raise children in a more rural setting". (1997:4) An interesting finding emerged in an interview with one particular parent when asked about the pressures of advertising on her as a parent

Claire*retail (boys 11,8,5)

"Ahh I suppose it is hard. It's not too bad here in the country because there's only a few of them in the school and they all seem to have the same kind of things. But I do know there's children like in town who are the same age as my children and they might have more things. And you kind of think when we're out here, I suppose we're lucky really because soon enough they will be going into the town school and then they will see it all".

Finally, when asked to rank in order the most influential advertising mediums, all but one put television in the top spot. This is in keeping with the literature and studies conducted by Pine and Nash (2002), Soni and Upadhyaya (2007), Robertson and Rossiter (1972) and Buijzen and Valkenberg (2000), but to name a few. However catalogue advertising is hot on its heels.

Mary* "For them it would be television advertisement, toy catalogues, online"

Maura* "TV definitely, followed by catalogues and then online, but then again, no maybe online next and then catalogues".

Lisa* "Television as long as we have sky, Catalogues, Internet"

Claire* "See I suppose the catalogues would only be around Christmas so I suppose probably the television."

Jane* "Catalogues or their peers no1, no2 online because they can go on themselves and do the research and TV no3."

4. <u>Conclusion</u>

To conclude, my research begged the question "Does the advertising influence the consumption of children's toys and video games in Ireland?" In short, the answer to this question is yes, advertising does hold a big influence over Irish children and their consumption of toys and video games. It became clear in my research that mass communications such as television and print are as prominent as ever the increasingly digitalised world we inhabit. It came as no surprise that findings revealed that television was in fact the strongest advertisement medium. However, toy catalogues were not far behind television with almost all parents putting it in second position and one putting it in the top place. From the interviews it was clear that the toy catalogue appears to hold a special place in Irish homes with some interviewees making reference to it as a 'bible' or 'battered phonebook', catalogues however are largely a seasonal attraction meaning the prevalence of television in everyday life makes it a clear winner. It became evident in my research that advertising has a greater impact on some children more so than others. Findings revealed that

children between the ages of 6 and 8 years are most susceptible to the powers of advertising. In relation to this my research revealed another very interesting point which I had previously never even considered. One of the participants had an autistic son who was 11, she explained what a strong hold advertising has over him, he is very impressionable and 'swallows' information. I found this to be very interesting discovery and feel further research could be carried out on this topic. I wanted to find out if merchandise from films/TV programmes were a big deal for Irish kids, and yet again the age grouping of 6-8 years old was brought to my attention. Parents revealed that for a lot of their kids it wouldn't hold any appeal, but for boys and girls alike 6, 7 and 8 year olds – they couldn't get enough of the merchandise associated with their favourite characters. The whole area of trading and collectables yielded quite fascinating results in this study. Judging by the data collected, this 'tradition' appears to be largely a boy thing, with little evidence of girls partaking in the trading and collecting system. I remember when I was young I was mad for collecting and trading Pokémon cards, however maybe that's just a reflection on me, or maybe in the last 15 years it has in fact become a 'boy thing'! In terms of video games, my specific focus was the advertising of over 18's games and how it's negotiated in the household. It became clear that there is huge demand for over 18's video games among boys under the age of 12; however my research revealed that 'peers' were the greatest influence when it came to children wanting these games. Advertising was mentioned; however friends of the same age having the games came out on top. So overall what pressures does child directed advertising place on the parents? Many issues came to light in relation to this, financial problems, stress, certain parents not being able to do their shopping in a particular grocery store, conflict within the household, bones of contention, but to name just a few. Overall, the results are pretty much what I expected them to be, with a few new discoveries being made along the way such as the links between autism and advertising, and also geographical location being a factor when it comes to advertising

pressures – one parent expressed relief that she lived in the country and her children went to a country school where they all pretty much had the same things. She felt if they lived in the town her children would want for a lot more. This was interesting as no other participants mentioned their geographical location being a factor .I think there is definite potential for further research in both of these fields.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Age and Gender of children:

Marital Status:

Occupation:

- On average how much television would your children watch per day?

- What television channels do you kids have access to?

- Do you feel that that adverts on television for toys and games have an impact on your children?

- Does merchandise from films or TV programmes appeal to your children?

- Would your kids ever request products that have been celebrity endorsed?

- When watching television, how do your children react to toy advertisements?

- Do you think toy catalogues are an influential marketing device?

- Do your kids have any concept of price when it comes to deciding what toys they want?

- Do your kids receive pocket money?

- What do they spend it on?

- Do your kids have access to the internet?

- Would they ever draw your attention to toys/games they had seen online?

- Would your kids ever pick out toys that they had not seen advertised?

- Have you had any experience with collectable toys? trading cards, football stickers/cards etc?

- Is there pressure on parents to buy certain toys and games?

- Has the downturn in the economy affected the amount of money parents spend on their kids?

- Have your kids ever pestered you for a toy until you gave in and bought it?

- Do you feel certain types of toys and games are over-advertised to kids?

- Do your kids play video games?

- Do they share consoles or do they each have their own?

- Would your kids ever request games that are aged at older age groups?

- Where do you think they became aware of these games?

- Would you ever rent video games?

- Do you think video games are in danger of taking over from traditional games?

- Would traditional games such as board games and jigsaws have a place in your home?

- In relation to toy stores, how often would you frequent the toy store and for what reason?

- How do you find the toy store experience with your kids?

- What do you think of programmes such as the late late toy show?

- Do you feel educational games are aimed more at adult consumers than kids?

- Have you ever found the advertisement of a toy to be misleading?

- Which of your children do you feel is most influenced by the power of advertising?

- Rate in order of rank the most influential – TV, internet, toy catalogues.

Appendix 2

Interview 3- Transcript

Could you tell me how many children ages they are?

I have a boy who's 8, and a girl who's 5

How much TV would they watch, both during the week and at weekends?

Every day I would say, and hour and half. Weekends that could be 5 hours a day realistically.

What television channels do you have?

We don't have any of the sky channels; it's kind of free to air – saorview. They'd be watching the Irish kids channels, we are able to get some other channels for kids free to air, cbbc or something like that

Do you think television adverts have an Impact on your kids?

Television advertising? Big-time, yes. Like just even basic stuff like shoes for kids – Lelly Kelly's that kind of thing that have toys in them, ya know there's toys in the shoes or you get a makeup thing with the boots. Moshlings, bin weevils, magazines advertised on TV everything, so everything then is wanted

How do they react to such advertisements?

I suppose they start talking about them a good bit. They'd absolutely remember them and then the next time they're in a shop their like drawn to it straight away

Would your children have an interest in merchandise linked to favourite TV programmes etc?

Yes most definitely, just say the 8 year old at the moment, he's into "the diary of a wimpy kid", he's into the series of books of that so he had to get the DVD, he's constantly researching it and he gets obsessed with the little characters then and things and he has to get them all, and the figurines, oh my god its crazy like, it's like nuts, its obsessive, they get very obsessive.

Would the same be true of Celebrity endorsed items?

Ah I can't say as much no, it would be more the TV characters. But the thing about it is in magazines now they'd have Simon Cowell as Simon growl or they'd have Justin Bieber as Dustin Beaver and things like that so they have mimicked characters.

Would advertising in toy catalogues have any impact on the children?

Mmmm yes, Cobra* catalogue comes and it's like a phonebook battered like a 10 year old phone book it's like gone through, gone through, gone through. The one does the pair of them because she's 5 not as bad. The 8 year old is extremely influenced. He's obsessive about stuff and will live, breathe, think everything he does is about characters. He cuts them out, he draws them out, drawings he does he sticks them on his wall it's like worship. He could have a hundred drawings of the same character doing different things ya know. It's incredible

Would the children have any concept of price when it comes to what toys they'd like?

Well ya he's starting to now, because we're saying no more. He's more demanding now that he's 8 so now he knows the price of things so he knows he's not going to get them. Now he's looking for 2 euro stuff instead of 12 euro stuff because he knows there might be a better chance of him getting it.

Do the children get Pocket money?

Not generally, we'd get them something if they wanted it but we wouldn't always say yes all the time.

If they were to get money from relations of friends, what would they do with it?

Money from relations he'd spend it but he'd literally ask say his auntie for the rest of the money if he hadn't enough because he knows exactly how much it cost and he would find the rest of the money somewhere to get what he wants.

Do the children have access to the internet and what do they use if for?

Yes.. He only goes on particular sites and id keep him to that, now he does go on YouTube ya know but I know what he's on and it's the same things he's watching cartoons and the same things over and over. But it's basically moshlings stuff and bin weevil stuff. Bin weevil there's all different characters.

Would your children ever ask for toys they hadn't seen advertised?

Never, it's always stuff that he's familiar with from the television. No no its always toy story, ice age, whatever is in like McDonalds. McDonalds is a great spot for targeting what's out at the minute.

Do the children have any interest in collectable toys?

He'd have like a massive collection of moshlings and their everywhere in the house, he had them in school today he'd be trading them, he'd have these collectable cards, they're like the football ones but they'd have monsters and cartoon characters on them.

Is there pressure on parents to buy certain things for their children and where does it come from?

It comes from the television and it comes from the internet, it's stressful, bringing him to town. She's alright but bringing him to town is like a battle and you know you're going to spend ten euro or more than you'd spend if you'd left him at home.

How often would you frequent the toy store and for what reason?

I never bring him to a toyshop, maybe once a year. Savers*, I don't even shop there because I can't like. It's too stressful; it's easier not to bring him. The younger girl is fine, its more clothes she'd want

Do you think the downturn in the economy had affected the amount of money parents are spending on their children?

I don't know like I don't see any change in that to be honest because I think the pressure is still there from kids and they're still seeing the same advertisements and everything so I think they're still getting as much as the good times.

Have you ever experienced pester power?

Absolutely, and you kind of go oh ill make it up in next week's shopping and ill cut back on something, for a quiet life like.

Do you think certain toys and games are over advertised to children?

Ahhm, I suppose its particular ones, those ones I've mentioned like the bin weevils and moshlings they seem to be just everywhere, like it seems to be our life at the moment in this house. They are everywhere.

Do your children play video games?

We have the Xbox and wii but they wouldn't play it that much. We have the Nintendo but we only have that for car journeys coz one of the kids used to get sick and that worked. I think

video games put them in bad humour so, no. When Santy brought a Nintendo to the older boy, he brought one to the 5 year old as well. So it was great coz there would be fighting.

Would your children ever ask for games aimed at an older age group?

Oh ya, in a friend's house they do be playing an over 18's game modern warfare or something and he wanted Santy to bring it to him and I just said no, and even the James Bond movie that's out, I think it's for over 15's or something ya know he wants to get it and I have to say no.

So it would be through friend's he'd become aware of these games?

It would be ya from his friends that he'd see it, and he'd be saying "well they all have it" or "they have mobile phones and I'm the only one who doesn't", but he's only 8 like come on.

Would you ever rent video games?

Maybe 3 or 4 times a year. I suppose buy them because it's as handy and they're as cheap to buy like

Do you think video games are taking over from traditional toys and games?

Oh ya they have done. Santy even brought snakes and ladders and stuff like that and it's just gone by the wayside. Monopoly was got as well like and we tried to but I suppose it's back to the parents again putting in the time and sitting down and doing it but if you step back from them then no they don't have the consistency, they want the television.

What's your opinion on programmes such as the late late toy show?

Well they don't serve any purpose really, I don't think because it is all commercial like there is nothing in them. It's entertainment for the kids but its pressure for the parents. There's nothing in them that they can learn from or grow, nothing.

Do educational games have any place in your home?

No not really, I know their good for helping you improve and be quicker at stuff but I think it's only creating more stress in anyone's person whether you're a child or an adult. I think it's only making you want to do things faster and be more highly strung. They would have got educational toys for Christmas but, there's one in the attic that's not used and there's a couple of little toy laptop things that they got from different people, they're not really used I have to say.

Have you ever found the advertising of a toy or games to be misleading?

Ahhhm, I suppose ya know when their buying all these figurines and things like their an awful price you'd be paying 6 euro for a little thing in a pack or you could be getting a gold or silver sealed pack and you don't know what's in it. It's the collectables, Ben* would be saying 'now we have to choose wisely, it might not be the one I want'. They often repeat themselves and then there are the rare ones, but they're in a sealed wrapper so you don't know what you're getting when you buy them so you have to keep buying them to get the ones you want. You might have 6 of one and then none of the ones you actually want.

Finally, could you rank in order of most influential – television advertising, catalogue advertising or advertising online?

TV definitely, followed by catalogues and then online, but then again, no maybe online next and then catalogues.

Appendix 3

Consent Form – Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project "Does advertising influence children's consumption of toys and video games in Ireland?"

My name is Sinead Carroll and I am a final year Media and Sociology student in National University of Ireland, Maynooth. For my 3rd year Sociology Thesis I am conducting research in the area of advertising and the marketing of toys and games to kids.

This interview may take up to one hour and with your permission we would like to tape record the conversation. A copy of the transcript can be made available if you wish to see it. All of the interview information will be kept confidential. I will store the tapes and notes of our conversation safely. Your identity will be kept confidential and I will use a pseudonym to identify your interview data. Neither your name nor private information will appear in the final research project.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions or may stop at any time. You may also withdraw at any time up until the work is completed.

There are no risks involved in this research and the interview does not constitute any type of counselling or treatment. The benefit to you is that you will have access to the research when it is finished and you may use it to understand how your experience compares with others or to the wider sociology literature.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at 0860686419/ sinead.carroll.2011@nuim.ie or my research supervisor Aphra Kerr at aphra.kerr@nuim.ie

"I have read the description above and consent to participate."

Signed_____

Date _____

Appendix 4

Consent Form – Observations

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my study "Does advertising influence children's consumption of toys and video games in Ireland?"

My name is Sinead Carroll and I am a final year Media and Sociology student in National University of Ireland, Maynooth. For my 3rd year Sociology Thesis I am conducting research in the area of advertising and the marketing of toys and games to kids.

My observations will take between one-two hours and I will simply be walking around the shop, observing and taking notes on the different methods of advertising used, and peoples reaction to such.

The benefit to you is that you will have access to the research when it is finished and you may use it to understand how your experience compares with others or to the wider sociology literature. All of the field notes will be kept confidential. I will store the notes taken safely. Both your identity and the identity of the store will be kept confidential. Neither your name, nor the shops will appear in my research. I will use pseudonyms to identify data collected.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at 0860686419/sinead.carroll.2011@nuim.ie or my research supervisor Aphra Kerr at aphra.kerr@nuim.ie.

"I have read the description above and consent to observation taking place."

Signed_____

Date _____