



Mothers Still Concerned About Marketers, But Take Responsibility

March 18, 2008: Waltham, MA - Invoke Solutions recently used their Engage Live and Open methodologies to conduct a 60-minute interactive research session with over 200 mothers of children under 18. The goal was to get a quantitative and qualitative read on how they feel about marketing to children, what is appropriate, and where the responsibility in protecting their children lies.

We covered five main areas: general perceptions, brands and product categories, media exposure, shopping with children, and whose responsibility it is to protect children.

1. General Perceptions

Overwhelmingly, mothers believe that there is too much marketing aimed at children (89%) and over half are extremely or very concerned about the situation (57%). One participant described the situation, *"Advertisements come on the television about toys. Your child sees it and wants it. Then they pressure you into buying it and it may be suitable. Example: video games. A lot of the video games are not suitable for some children."*

Said another, *"Lots of these ads make children want things that are usually not good for them. The ads have lots of appeal to children but usually I have to be the bad guy and say no to the majority of them."*

They fear that marketers will have a negative impact on a range of issues with the biggest being materialism (82% top 2 box), body image (72% top 2 box), childhood obesity (69% top 2 box), and low self esteem (65% top 2 box).

One mother summed it up by saying *"I think it sets an example about what is acceptable and 'cool', and I don't want my kids to eat junk or feel they have to wear a certain kind of shoe to be accepted and friends with someone. There's enough peer pressure from school. They don't need more."*

2. Brands and Product Categories: The Good and the Bad

Mothers are very aware of marketing that is targeted directly to their children (66% very or extremely aware) and are concerned about its impact, especially with unhealthy food items and inappropriate toys and games. Fast food and carbonated beverages were considered the least appropriate product categories to be marketing to children (70% of mothers labeled each of them inappropriate.)

"Food items should not be marketed directly to children," said one mother. *"It is the responsibility of the parent to monitor what the child eats so you know that they are eating well."*

Still, not all marketers were labeled as bad. Some of the brands that came up as most admirable were Toys r us, Kellogg's, and Mattel. Also, brands that were considered to be selling healthy products or encouraging reading were seen in a favorable light.

For example, one mother says she likes Scholastic books because *"Scholastic Books sponsors book fairs in the schools and a portion of the sale goes back to help the school. They also match fund-raising efforts for schools."*

3. Media Exposure

More and more children have access to their own technology which allows them to be exposed to marketers without supervision. Still, 83% of mothers claim to monitor their activity “frequently” or “all the time.”

Some of the ways that they monitor include:

- *“When my son is on the computer checking e-mail, I like to know who the e-mail is from and what is being said.”*
- *“I have parental blocks on my children’s accounts. I have access to their emails and have a program that tells me what websites they have visited.”*
- *“I limit the time they can play and make sure the games they are playing are age appropriate. I check for violence, language, inappropriate scenes or actions. I don’t buy “Teen” or “Mature” rated games, but some can be offensive to younger kids.”*
- *“I ask them about their online activities, the computer is located in the kitchen. The TV is in the family room. No electronics in the bedroom.”*

In terms of television viewing, 40% of mothers watch with their children most of the time with only 17% giving their children the ability to watch whatever they want, when they want. Instead, children are given approved shows or timeslots for their viewing. Even with television clearly having the largest impact on children of all media, 69% of mothers feel that their TV choices are age appropriate.

4. The Shopping Experience

The efforts of marketers in reaching children directly take on a life of their own when moms bring their kids shopping with them. Clearly some marketing is working as 92% of mothers state that their children ask for specific products and brands when taken on shopping trips, especially in the toy, food, snack, game, and entertainment categories.

While the impact of those suggestions varies across categories, most mothers give in at least sometimes saying they try to balance saying yes and no (66%) or say yes as much as they can afford to (17%).

As one mother stated *“my kids are most involved in picking out clothing, foods, toys and movies but don’t always get to buy what they pick out.”*

Another focused on food and the benefits of letting children have an impact. *“They are most involved in the grocery buying decision because they have to eat the food too and it makes it easier and more fun when they are involved in some of the decision as to what we buy. mostly snack food items.”*

5. Responsibility: Who Owns It

Even with all of the negativity felt towards marketers and specifically those targeting children with unhealthy snacks and games, mothers still feel strongly that it is parents’ job to protect their children (89% agree) and that the media should play a more proactive role in limiting marketing to children(83% agree), more than they feel that schools and the government need to play a bigger part.

In their own words:

- *“Companies would just have to be more responsible in making more educational marketing, but it's a free country, and we parents are primarily free to turn off the tube when we see something we don't want our kids to see-the only thing I would suggest is a warning or disclaimer, or limiting advertising to a certain time frame per day. (ratings like the Y or PG in the corner of some programs).”*
- *“I feel advertisers should take the issues that were brought up earlier such as self-image, child obesity, violence, materialism, etc. into consideration when deciding what and when to advertise products.”*
- *“I don't think it should be federally regulated. Maybe state regulated. But then again, the advertisers should be responsible and if they don't the parents should teach their children to be responsible about what they choose, or want and why.”*
- *“It would be nice if we lived in a perfect world and companies would not stoop to inappropriate marketing to children, but if they are going to push things that are potentially harmful or controversial then there should be limits.”*
- *“I don't think regulation is the answer. Parents need to be proactive in teaching their kids about marketing.”*

If you'd like a transcript of the session or want to view the session dashboard (which includes more about the role of age and gender in mother's perceptions, shopping habits, and media consumption) contact us at: josh.mendelsohn@invoke.com or visit http://www.invoke.com/index/topic_archive.

About Invoke Solutions

Invoke Solutions is the leading innovator of real-time researching technologies that help businesses gain instant insight into the opinions, views, and dynamics of their customers, employees, and other constituents. Unlike traditional, costly, and decades old research methodologies, Invoke's mobile and online research platforms have been developed specifically to provide a more engaging experience for participants and give businesses faster, more useful results with the depth of insight needed to make important decisions.

Invoke partners with leading global research firms and Fortune 1000 companies to enable faster, smarter decisions throughout the marketing and product innovation lifecycle. From brand exploratory research to final communications testing and product concept tests to in-home use studies, Invoke delivers the insight needed to move forward with confidence, faster.

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