

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL ON THE
AGENTIC CHILD'S BRAND CHOICES

CHERYL ELIZABETH GREYSON

SID: 1360837

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The conception of this work stretches back to my earliest memory, when, aged four, I reached through the hole of an incubator to touch my newly born brother. Despite the tubes and machines, the moment I placed my finger against his palm, his fingers curled over mine into a tight fist. To him, it was the unconscious Darwinian reflex; to me, it was a sign that he would hold on to life. Despite a pessimistic prognosis, his development followed a normal pattern as he refined his hand-eye coordination and pincer grip, holding objects between his thumb and finger. I remembered those critical milestones when my children were born. Their fine motor skills advanced, just like my brother a generation previously, but as toddlers, they rejected stacking blocks for smartphones, reversing the pincer grip into a swipe of the thumb and forefinger. My children are part of the touch screen generation.

This fascination in watching my children develop their technological skills instinctively and rapidly was tinged with alarm. My maternal instinct to protect my daughters from predators and malign commercial influences was at odds with their drive to seek, explore, learn, share, and have fun online with branded websites and apps that they had discovered themselves, with seemingly no help or influence from me. My observations and parental concerns prompted my research questions for this thesis, so it is only right that I firstly thank my very own digital natives, Charlotte, and Jessica. They have been my research guinea pigs, advised me on the finer points of Minecraft and helped me to review my data collection methods from a child's perspective. I hope that having a Mum who is titled Dr (even if she can't fix a broken leg) will be an inspiration for them in their lives.

A part-time PhD whilst working full-time was always going to be tough, but this period has been exceptionally challenging for our family. This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents, Linda, and David, who taught me the value of hard work and never giving up. You told me that the world was my oyster and that has always stayed with me.

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Finally, to my husband Mark, who has supported me through this journey. You have it in writing that this is the last qualification! I don't mind if you only read this page. And I told you it wasn't just about social media...

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ABSTRACT

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This doctoral research explores the changing behaviour of children in the digital world and the drivers for their brand preference online. It is interdisciplinary joining the academic conversations around brand relationships and preference in marketing with the evolving sociological view of the autonomous child and its arguably abridged childhood. The aim is to provide greater understanding of the factors that influence children to form brand choices online, the nature of those brand engagements, and how to explore children's views on this topic. It contributes to a gap in knowledge around children and their behaviour towards brands in a digital environment, as indicated by analysis of coverage in top marketing journals and links to academic conversations in connected fields of literature around the changing nature of children and childhood. The methodology used a theoretical lens of 'brand relationship quality' theory in relation to young consumer-brand interactions and the work of Fournier (1998). It used an exploratory qualitative and observational approach with two-stage interviews with buddy pairs of children aged 4-11 in a school setting using arts and creative task-based participatory techniques. This doctorate study extends the marketing literature by exploring consumer behaviour and brand choices of child consumers in a business environment that is characterised by the increasing role of digitalisation and increased complexity. It finds that traditional consumer buying behaviour models do not adequately describe children's current drivers of brand choice. It makes three contributions to knowledge: a framework offering a new way of examining the definitive role projected by the qualitative researcher in children's research and its interpretation by children; an original reinterpretation of Fournier's work on brand relationship quality applied to children and the digital environment; and a new conceptualisation of children's agentic behaviour in the digital landscape contributing to the understanding of children's digital brand relationship quality.

Key words: Children, digital, brand choice, agency, relationships, consumer behaviour, research methods.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

'The move from analogue to digital technology is one of those revolutionary changes. It will define the competitiveness of our economy and change dramatically the way we lead our lives.'

*Rt Hon Lord Mandelson and Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP,
(Department for Business Innovation and Skills, and Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2009, pp.1-25)*

1.1 THE RISE OF DIGITAL

In 2009, the UK Government addressed the need to ready Britain for the 'reality' of a digital future, identifying the need for a communications infrastructure built upon digital technologies, and the development of people's skills and capabilities to participate in a digital society. Today, digital is our everyday reality through the interconnectivity of people, organisations, and things. Digital is so ubiquitous that some marketers argue that it can no longer be 'siloes' as a discipline separate from the 'so-called traditional [marketing] channels' (Chahal, 2016). Indeed, the rise of omnichannel marketing strategies integrating both sales channels and sales modes 'to provide a seamless customer experience' (Tuten, 2020, p.252) would suggest that is true. Customers want a seamless experience when engaging with brands regardless of device i.e., desktop, laptop, mobile and tablet, or digital property e.g., websites, apps, blogs, and social media (Stocker, 2014), and an integration of physical and digital channels for a 'frictionless retail process' (WARC, 2020a).

Digital has been a major disrupter for industries such as publishing, entertainment, travel, and tourism (Fagan, 2017, pp.22-33). It has also facilitated changes in consumer behaviour that impact on brand management, such as consumers buying online, user generated content, consumers engaging in two-way relationships with brands, and the growth of the sharing economy (Geissinger, Laurell and Sandström, 2020).

Arguably, the most significant disruptors in consumer behaviour are being driven by the younger generations. Digital has always been an everyday reality for younger consumers, otherwise known as 'digital natives', a term commonly attributed to Prensky (2001) which has fallen into modern lexicon as marketers' label for those born into and raised in the digital age.

Digital natives fall into three distinct generations: Generation Y born between 1977 and 1995; Generation Z born 1996 and later (The Centre for Generational Kinetics, 2016), and the emerging Generation Alpha born from 2011 to 2025 (Lavelle, 2019). Surprisingly, there are no agreed standard definitions for the beginning and end birth dates of the generations listed in Table 1: Generational Categories, despite their usefulness as forms of nomenclature for consumer segmentation that demarcate and describe attitudinal and behavioural variations by birth date. Despite any minor variations in the category bandings, many children in Generations Z and Alpha are clearly being raised as second-generation digital natives.

Table 1: Generational Categories

Generation Band	Birth Dates
Generation Alpha	2011 to 2025
iGen, Gen Z, Generation Z, or Centennials	1996 to 2010
Gen Y, Generation Y, or Millennials	1977 to 1995
Generation X	1965 to 1976
Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964
Traditionalists or Silent Generation	1945 and earlier

Source: The Centre for Generational Kinetics (2016); Lavelle, (2019).

In fact, technology has drawn a ‘schism between [the] generations’ firmly dividing the digital natives from the digital immigrants, according to a large-scale study by McCann Group’s global intelligence unit (Collins, 2016). The concept of a digital schism is supported by the authors of *Born Digital* (Palfrey and Gasser, 2016, p.2) who claim that digital natives see no distinction between their online and offline life: ‘there’s just life; the two are nearly seamless’. Certainly, most children today within Generation Z (born 1996 to 2010) would be pushed to remember a time when social media and constant connectivity were not a part of everyday life (Clough, 2016; Inskip, 2016), with the first iPhone launching in 2007 with a multi-touch screen and the ‘pinching of images to zoom in’ (Agar, 2013, p.204), and the first forms of social media like MySpace, LinkedIn and Harvard Facebook appearing in 2003 to 2004 (Avalaunchmedia, 2013).

These second-generation digital natives in Generations Z and Alpha are a major consumer target grouping and will account for approximately 40% of the UK population by 2029 (WARC and Trajectory, 2016), with Generational Z alone having an annual spending power of \$80 billion just in the USA (Inskip, 2016). However, the way in which brands will need to engage with children to win their attention and loyalty compared to previous generations, and what arguably they should not do in terms of exerting undue influence, is potentially quite different as will be discussed in the next section (and indeed, across the rest of this study).

1.2 CHANGING BEHAVIOUR OF CHILD CONSUMERS

Generation Z (born 1996 to 2010) has demonstrated advanced maturation, moving towards ‘grown-up product categories’ (WARC, 2016; Clough, 2016) much more quickly than previous generations, influencing a larger share of family purchases and the media consumed within the household. It appears that children and young people today are exerting more autonomy over their brand choices and preference. So, why might this be the case?

In an online environment, children may have more freedom to choose brands than they do in the physical environment. In an offline shopping experience, a child is exposed to brands and advertising in the supermarket, participates in selecting food items and makes requests, but as Gram found (2015, p.188), the parent is the ‘gatekeeper at all times’. Children lack the purchasing power and authority to have the final say over which brands end up in the shopping trolley.

Compare that to more autonomous online experiences, where a child can choose their own programming to watch on Netflix or Disney apps, watch an influencer’s vlog, download a free branded game, add goods to their parent’s Amazon shopping basket, or inadvertently click on enabled in-app purchases for games on their tablet device or games console which can be an

expensive mistake (Kleinman, 2019). Even if the parent applies a child lock or profile, or does not store payment card details, the child can still exert their autonomy by making choices over their brand preference. In the offline world, the child might have the opportunity to go shopping with a parent a few times per week, but now the opportunities to purchase or download are unlimited, and critically, are available from within the home environment.

The parental influence is the first most children have in their lives, and 'colours the perception of everything that follows' with the superego acting as an 'internalised parent' (Blythe, 2013, p.241). In the era before digital and media fragmentation, children were exposed to fewer adverts and entertainment channels. Traditional gender roles influenced family decision-making and purchasing (Kotler, et al., 2008, p.247); brand choice was restricted by limited alternatives and transportation e.g., smaller shops and more reliance on public transport; and children spent less time on screens (Palfrey and Gasser, 2016, p.94). In fact, brand loyalty was much more likely to be inherited due to habitual use of products in the family unit (see Chapter 2.4) leading to purchasing and favourable attitudes towards brands in adulthood e.g., new parents, faced with a myriad of baby products and little sleep, gravitated towards traditional family favourites like Johnson's Baby Lotion, Pampers and Sudocreme. Is this still the case in the contemporary family unit?

Children today make brand choices every time they browse a website, download a game or app, or watch a YouTube video. Equally, children are engaging with brands from a 'multitude of touchpoints' online and offline; in fact, Mikolajová and Olšanová (2017, p.35) identified 18 touchpoints between a car brand and children between the ages of 3 to 18 in their qualitative study. Global brands like Disney have created 'truly seamless experiences both online and in the real world' for their customers (Larsen, 2017), creating, for example, a digital app to plan a trip to Disney World and retail collaborations with Target stores with 'special engagement experiences' including interactive displays, Instagrammable photo opportunities and a seating area to watch Disney films (Danziger, 2019). Those Disney brand touchpoints are then reinforced through licensing arrangements for everything from books, dressing-up clothes and yoghurt. Children are constantly being exposed to brands, online and offline, through a multitude of touchpoints, in a very sophisticated and integrated way. With today's fast moving sophisticated digital world, are children discovering brands ahead of their parents and can brand relationships and preference be as deep-rooted within the family unit as they were in previous generations?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This doctoral research seeks to explore the changing behaviour of children in the digital world and the drivers for their brand preference. It is interdisciplinary in nature joining the academic conversations around brand relationships and preference in marketing with the evolving sociological view of the autonomous child and its arguably abridged childhood. Historical views of the child and childhood have moved from a perspective where children were perceived as incompetent actors or lesser beings, to one where children are generally considered to be independent agents (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Pinter and Zandian, 2014) capable of developing their own opinions, attitudes, and sentiment.

The concept of children's 'agency' or the 'agentic child' is a rejection of previous ideas that children are 'a defective form of adult, social only in their future potential but not in their present

being' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.6). Rethinking children as 'beings' rather than 'becomings', and as 'coherent, knowing, [and] autonomous' imbues them with 'agency', which is defined by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p.502) as 'the ability of an identifiable being to knowingly and deliberately use its willpower to achieve predetermined aims'. This concept will be further discussed in Chapter 2.1.

The aim of this study therefore is to provide greater understanding of the factors that influence children to form brand choices in a digital world, and the nature of their online brand engagements.

This study will explore the following research objectives and questions:

RO1: To investigate the drivers of brand choice for children in a digital world.

RQ1: Who or what is influencing children to make brand choices in a digital environment?

RQ2: Are children making brand choices online autonomously and has their behaviour become more agentic in the digital landscape?

RQ3: Do traditional consumer buying behaviour models adequately describe children's current drivers of brand choice and associated behaviour?

RQ4: What is the best way to explore children's own views and potentially changing and more agentic behaviours in order to answer this objective?

RO2: To explore how children engage with brands online compared to other types of interaction.

RQ5: What types of brands or product category are most attractive to children?

RQ6: What meaning do children ascribe to these brand interactions online and does it differ to engagement with the same brands offline? Is there a brand relationship?

RQ7: Do these interactions with brands differ by gender, age or other demographic factors?

RQ8: Are children navigating digital environments independently?

RQ9: Are children navigating digital environments safely, with an awareness of the commercial nature of these interactions?

1.4 THE RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The findings of the research will connect sociological literature on the changing nature of childhood and the increasingly agentic nature of the child, with marketing literature on brands and digital marketing. This academic work will draw on learnings in children's research across other disciplines such as childhood studies, education, health, social welfare, sociology and psychology to inform the primary research methodology, drawing new insight into digital brand preference, and pushing forward the marketing field of literature.

The general topic of marketing and children or families is minimally covered in the top marketing academic journals with only 0.3% related articles (2 articles out of 750 in the past 15 years to 2020, Volume 84, Issue 6) in the *Journal of Marketing* (4* AJG 2018); and 1.3% related articles (19 articles out of 1,442 in the past 15 years to 2020, Volume 54, Issue 6) in the *European Journal of Marketing* (3 AJG 2018). The *European Journal of Marketing* published a special edition on the impact of marketing on children's well-being in a digital age in 2016 (Volume 50, Issue 11) indicating a growing interest in the impact of digital upon young consumers.

Most children's research is conducted by research agencies for brand marketers, media owners, and regulatory bodies, although much of this grey literature is inaccessible and unpublished apart from conference slide decks, sales literature, and case studies for awards. This relevant professional literature has source bias being predominately conducted for commercial gain e.g., using the results of syndicated research studies to sell an argument for advertising in one brand over another.

Yet, according to Scott (2008, p.87), many general-purpose quantitative studies of the population consider children to be out of scope or rely on adults to answer 'for' their child. In my recent consultancy experience, many research agencies over rely on convenient methodologies e.g., the ubiquitous online panel survey with adult participants because of cost, convenience, the challenges of creating appropriate data collection tools for a younger audience, and/or ethical concerns. This is not to say data collection with the child is impossible, but the design requires careful thought and consideration of the researcher's philosophical stance towards the construct of childhood and child development and the use of appropriate techniques tailored to the child's cognitive stage. This will be discussed further in the methodology section in Chapter 3.1.

This research will therefore contribute to a gap in knowledge around children and their behaviour towards brands in a digital environment, as indicated by the analysis of relevant coverage in top marketing journals. It will link to conversations in connected fields of literature around the changing nature of children and their childhood. It will provide guidance to brand marketers, without the influence of source bias, to enable them to engage with children more effectively through digital platforms without falling foul of ethics or legislation. Additionally, the methodology will seek to offer new and innovative ways of researching children's own views about digital marketing without undue influence from the researcher, providing a toolkit of methods that can be employed by future researchers and brand marketers wishing to undertake research with children, rather than on children (an issue that will be discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3).

1.5 THE SCOPE

The definition of digital marketing platforms for the purpose of this study are the range of hardware, mobile and software platforms 'which marketers can use to reach and interact with their audience through content marketing or advertising' (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, pp.12-13), namely desktop browsers and apps, mobile apps and browsers, social networks, and gaming platforms. Electronic devices are defined as technology platforms and include desktop computers; laptop computers; mobiles including smartphones; tablets; and gaming consoles (Idem, p.xiii). The definitions have been drawn from Chaffey's work due to his status,

as a leading digital academic and practitioner, who has brought digital marketing into the mainstream, demystifying its definitions which he refers to as a 'bewildering range of labels and jargon created by both academics and professionals' (Idem, p.10). Children attending primary school in the UK (between the ages of 4 and 11) have been selected as the target market with justification for the choice of sample provided in Chapter 3.

1.6 THE CONTENTS

This thesis follows Wolcott's view of the literature review in qualitative research (2009, p.69) by drawing on literature selectively throughout the work. The issues relating to children and branding are examined in the literature review in Chapter 2, but a range of sources are referred to from both academic, commercial and grey literature to inform the discussion of research methods with young children in Chapter 3.

The concept of 'children as consumers' cannot be considered without first establishing what in fact is 'a child'. The definition of 'the child' and 'childhood' is examined from a sociological and historical perspective in the literature review. This forms the foundations of this research as the idea of the agentic child as consumer is examined: in terms of the historical development of the consumer culture of childhood; children's growing importance to consumer markets; their independence versus cognitive ability to process commercial messages; and issues around exploitation and protection. The literature review also examines children's usage of digital devices and channels, particularly in relation to their independent use of technology; the theoretical lens of brand relationship quality theory in a digital world; and brand affinity from a child's perspective.

In the methodology section, the notion of whether children can hold an opinion about a brand, which is likely to be influenced by popular culture and their social environment but is 'independent' of their parent/guardian is addressed throughout Chapter 3, where the research design and philosophical approach will be discussed. Power dynamics and the role of the researcher in data gathering and observation is critically analysed in Chapter 3.1 through an examination of the literature relating to the stance taken by the researcher in qualitative studies. The approach to interviewing children, particularly during qualitative research, is examined from the standpoint of ethics (Chapter 3.3) but also the data collection methods following the rise of co-creation techniques and the use of participatory creative and arts-based methodologies (Chapter 3.2). Finally, the chapter ends by setting out the research procedures for the primary research (Chapter 3.4).

In Chapter 4, the findings of the qualitative research will be presented and discussed. This includes research that queries the 'least-adult' standpoint proposed by Mandell (1998). Is taking on the characteristics and behaviour of a child to match the subject of the interview the right approach or is it better to take on a superior role, or something in-between? Findings from the primary research are analysed and discussed in Chapter 4 from several different perspectives to examine children's digital capabilities and their use of spaces – both online and offline; a section on children's digital safety offering new insight into brands' commercial relationships to manage exposures and protect both parties legally and ethically; an examination of children's brand knowledge and finally, their brand choices and preference. This includes findings that were originally presented at the MRS Kids & Youth Conference in

London, UK, (Greyson, 2016) on the 'vomit-inducing' brand properties of Barbie and provides new ideas on how children develop passionate love or loathe responses to brands.

Chapter 5 concludes this work by summarising the findings in relation to the objectives from a marketing perspective. It looks at what we know from current research in the field and draws on new methodological approaches to conducting research with children and developing brand relationships digitally in order to contribute to the body of knowledge in marketing and branding to children.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this study therefore is to provide greater understanding of the factors that influence children to form brand choices in a digital world, and the nature of their online brand engagements. The literature review is divided into four sections summarising and synthesising the contributory fields of literature from marketing and the broader social sciences that relate to the research objectives for this study.

Chapter 2.1 looks at definitions of the child; the historical development of childhood as a social construct; childhood development and changing patterns of maturation; the agency of children; and new theories relating to childhood development in the digital era.

This forms the foundations of the discussion in Chapter 2.2 with the historical development of the consumer culture of childhood; children's growing importance to consumer markets; their independence versus cognitive ability to process commercial messages; and issues around exploitation and protection in the digital world.

In Chapter 2.3, children's usage of digital devices and channels is explored, particularly in relation to their independent use of technology and their personal geographies, namely the personal space online and offline that they create to define themselves.

In Chapter 2.4, the theoretical lens relating to brand relationship quality theory in a digital world is critically analysed examining young children's understanding of brands; drivers of brand choice; the nature of child-brand relationships both online and offline; and the principles of gauging the strength or popularity of a children's brand in order to understand what brands or product categories are most popular. Gaps in knowledge are identified around the measurement of children's brand relationship quality, particularly when interacting with brands via a multitude of devices, technology platforms, or marketing channels. This chapter concludes with a conceptual framework of the factors that influence children to form brand choices in a digital world, and the nature of their online brand engagements.

2.1 THE AGENTIC CHILD AND CHILDHOOD

'Grown-ups can never understand anything by themselves,

and it's tiresome for children to always have to explain things to them.'

De Saint-Exupéry (1943, p.4)

Children can be targeted as a consumer segment in marketing and understanding their behaviours towards brands online and the drivers of choice is the focus of this study, but the first question to be asked is: what is a child?

2.1.1 DEFINING THE CHILD

In popular culture in the UK, we have retained two rites of passage that move an individual from 'one state to another' to distinguish a child from an adult (Blythe, 2013, p.192), namely the 18th and 21st birthdays. Both signal a symbolic milestone: the 18th when majority is attained according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child later ratified by the UK Government (NSPCC, 2017); and the 21st when according to custom, the young person is

given the 'key to the door' and reaches full adulthood. The age of majority in this country was changed from 21 to 18 following the Family Law Reform Act of 1969 (c.46) but the ritual of celebrating this event persists and consequently adulthood is conventionally celebrated via a two-stage process.

Child developmentalists like Piaget (1964) define the child by determined milestones of development which check the physical and cognitive progress made by the average child. These stages of development benchmark the age or stage children should be able to process information, make decisions, reflect, and evaluate.

Sociologists would take a different stance with their first question being, not what is a child, but what is childhood? The definition of this term and its meaning has changed throughout history towards a new sociology of childhood (which will be addressed in this chapter) and yet, as will be proposed here, is changing again in the digital age. It appears to be changing faster than ever before due to children's rapid maturation (WARC, 2016; Clough, 2016) and technological advances.

Understanding the ontology of a child and the difference between adults and children is especially important in informing the research approach of this study. Children have often been treated as an object in research, rather than as a subject, particularly in health and social studies, without the right to express their own opinions, needs or grant assent (Carter and Ford, 2013; Lomax, 2012; Harden, et al., 2000; Lambert and Glacken, 2011; Jones, 2009, p.52; Sammons, et al., 2016). Understanding the child and the construct of childhood will provide a better understanding of their agency and independence of thought with the aim of accessing children's voices, rather than reported behaviours, in this marketing research study. This chapter will therefore consider the concept and origin of childhood, theories of child development, and changes in attitude towards the child.

2.1.2 DEFINING CHILDHOOD

The diachronic study of childhood by French historian Philippe Ariès (1960) begins in the sixteenth century when the custom of obfuscating one's precise age was considered good manners. This curious custom, a vestige from an era when it was difficult to be precise about a date or time, lingered until personal chronology became the norm. Decorum aside, society was interested in age more generally as a means to measure life and human development. The pseudo-scientific theory of the 'Ages of Man' (Idem, pp.16-30) had been in existence since the Middle Ages, categorising the stages of life as: childhood (infancy); puerility; adolescence; youth; senility; and old age. According to this theory, childhood begins at birth until the age of 7, followed by puerility until 14, and then adolescence until 21, 28, 30 or even 35 depending on the source. In this definition, youth is what we would think of as almost middle aged. Although Ariès' insight is criticised for an over reliance on the analysis of paintings (Montgomery, 2009, p.52), his extensive historical narrative suggests that childhood is socially constructed and that it is influenced by the times and the prevailing culture.

Qvortrup (2009, pp.23-25) supports Ariès' definition by explaining childhood as both 'a period' and a 'permanent form of any generational structure'. By this, he refers to the period of an individual's childhood until they reach adulthood, and childhood as a 'social space within which children lead their life'. Equally, Corsaro (2015, p.3) explains how this space and its nature

changes throughout history, but as a structural form, it remains the same. This also aligns with Hardman's earlier work (1973, p.87) commenting that while 'children will move in and out of this segment into another, but others take their place. The segment still remains.'

Childhood is not just a structural element within society; it appears to be shaped by the lives lived by children and as James, Jenks and Prout see it, by 'time passing' (1998, pp.60-61). They identify temporal frameworks that order children's lives to give them 'shape and pattern' and 'through which their lives unfold' such as ecological time frames (the passing of the seasons in agricultural families); age-set systems such as school where children of the same age pass through a structured curriculum; and children's use of their precise age in terms of restrictions on their social activities e.g. a child who knows they can get their ears pierced or walk home from school alone at a certain juncture. The experience of childhood is not universal; it will differ by culture, through history, and through the passing of the years for the individual child. As Jones (2009, p.23) says, childhood is 'active, changing and changeable'. These findings ring particularly true for children whose lives and temporal frameworks were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which shut UK schools from March 2020 to the end of the school year, and again in 2021.

Both Qvortrup (2009) and Hardman (1973) talk of childhood as a 'period' or 'segment' in which children lead their life which has permanence in any 'generational structure'. This has been challenged by Frost (2009, p.74) who noted that in the Victorian era, childhood ended abruptly and early with the 'beginning of work' and in more contemporary society by Postman (1994, pp.79-80) who argued that the accessibility of TV programming and commercials 'erodes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood' as it does not segregate its audience. He suggested that 'new media' would make it impossible to 'withhold any secrets', which he believes is the key to childhood. The idea that digital is some form of opened Pandora's Box is not unique to Postman. Both the government today and many parents are concerned about screen time (World Health Organisation, 2019) but is allowing children the opportunity to freely entertain and inform themselves harmful, or indeed ending childhood in the constructed form that we know? This is certainly an area that will be explored further in this research study.

The conceptualisation of childhood and the child has evolved over the last forty years. In terms of scholarly activity, children were historically considered a minority social group and the prevailing social views towards women and childcare saw the subject dismissed as women's work (Hardman, 1973; Mayall, 2002). Indeed, Erikson (1951, p.363) admonished historians and philosophers for failing to acknowledge the function of childhood and the value both of women and education to nurture the 'dawn of individual consciousness'. By examining the historical context and ideas about cognitive and physical development, it will be possible to review whether the child, or the generational social construct of childhood, is changing further, or faster, in today's digital environment.

2.1.3 CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Since the Middle Ages, society has been preoccupied with children growing up. In Medieval art, there was no clear distinction between childhood and adulthood. Children in paintings were depicted without the 'characteristics of childhood' in their expression or features and were simply drawn on a smaller scale with the 'musculature of an adult' (Ariès, 1960, p.31). Childhood was viewed as something temporal, not worthy of artistic record. Ariès comments

that, as soon as a child was weaned and able to live without the constant attentions of his mother or nanny, he 'belonged to adult society' (1960, p.125).

In the Victorian era, the 1870 Elementary Education Act (33&34 Vict., c.75) gave school boards the right to insist children attended school until 10 or 11 years old but fell short of compulsory education because of sympathy for parents who needed their children's earnings and farmers who needed their labour (Digby and Searby, 1981, p.10). Child mortality rates were also high, at approximately 154 infant deaths per thousand live births in 1860 (The University of Portsmouth, 2017), as illustrated in Figure 1: Family Mortality Rates. Growing up meant surviving the perils of childhood, as well as contributing towards the family's coffers.

Figure 1: Family Mortality Rates

Mr Charles Sugg and Mrs Annie Sugg - 39 years married, 15 children born alive, 7 children surviving, 8 who have died. Charles Sugg is the 2nd Great Grandfather of the Author of this study.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family.	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX.		PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE.					
		For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow," or opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of:—	Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one."	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have died.
of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who (1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or (2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)	State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Son," "Daughter," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."								
1 Mr Charles Sugg	Head	61	Married						
2 Mrs Annie Sugg	Wife	56	Married	39	15	7	8		
3 Mr William Sugg	Son	25	Single						
4 Mr Edward Sugg	"	23	Single						
5 Mr Charles Sugg	"	21	Single						
6 Mr James Sugg	"	12							
7 Miss Daisy Sugg	Daughter	16	Single						
8 Miss Beatrice Sugg	"	14	Single						
9 Miss Lillian Sugg	"	18	Single						

Source: 1911 Census, The National Archives

A male literacy rate of 86% in 1880 (Digby and Searby, 1981, p.4), demonstrated by the percentage of bridegrooms signing their marriage certificates instead of making a mark, reflected the impact of the 1870 'Forster' Elementary Education Act (33&34 Vict., c.75). Mass compulsory education, the 1833 Factory Act (3&4 Will. IV, c.103) and a recognition of childhood led to emerging theories of childhood development.

Established theories of childhood development, such as Piaget (1964), are generally connected to the progressive education movement and involve examining children in terms of their development to identify the stages of progression through childhood for the average, surviving child. They are central to our understanding of children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development, and the impact upon their digital behaviours, their relationship with brands, and their understanding of advertising and other commercial messages. This section

will critically review traditional theories, alongside newer ideas about children’s development, with the purpose of shaping the methodology for this branding study and examining whether traditional theories can be applied to Generation Z and Alpha.

2.1.3.1 THE TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Piaget’s constructivist approach helped to shape our view of how young children think in their early years and how their reasoning changes over time. He married children’s cognitive development with their physical development (Prout, 2005, p.53) and believed that their growth is connected to their interactions with their environment. Piaget (1964) considered that elements of learning occur ‘as a function of total development, rather than being an element which explains development’ suggesting that without development, further learning cannot take place.

His stages theory (Table 2: Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development) stretches from birth to the teenage years, however, as children may show differences in development stretching over ‘a broad continuum’ (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.80), not all children will reach the identified stages at the same time, or even at all for those whose development does not follow a normalised pattern.

Table 2: Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

Age	Stage	Behaviours
Birth to age 2	Sensorimotor	Learn through the senses; learn through reflexes; manipulate materials.
2-7 years	Preoperational	Form ideas based on their perceptions; can only focus on one variable at a time; overgeneralise based on limited experience.
7-11 or 12 years	Concrete Operational	Form ideas based on reasoning; limit thinking to objects and familiar events.
11 or 12 years and older	Formal Operational	Think conceptually; think hypothetically.

Source: Piaget (1973 cited in Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.81)

Piaget believed that cognitive development begins when infants’ reactions have a purpose, e.g., babies using their ‘senses and physical activity to learn about the world’ (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.82). It is at this sensorimotor stage that children first learn about the permanence of objects and that even if an object, like a toy, is not in their sights, it can still exist, e.g., when an adult plays a game of peekaboo with a favourite toy.

Preoperational stage children from the ages of 2 to 7, are egocentric according to Piaget (Garhart Mooney, 2013, pp.85-86). By this, he means that children see the world from their own point of view and lack the experience to connect this to what other children say. Children

therefore form their way of thinking from their own direct experiences and their focus is limited to one attribute at a time, e.g., a child thinking that everyone has the same cereal for breakfast.

Concrete operational children start to develop capabilities that are important to marketers; they can hold numerous qualities about an object in their mind at one time therefore they could understand the attributes held by one brand over another.

Formal operational is a significant stage-gate for cognitive development when children achieve the ability to think hypothetically about an issue and use their logic to question motivations or principles, e.g., whether a company's products are damaging the environment.

Piaget believed that four factors move children from one stage to another: maturation as a 'continuation of the embryogenesis' (Piaget, 1964); experience gleaned from the physical environment; social transmission from education or language via an adult; and finally, 'equilibration' or self-regulation, where a child adapts understanding on 'the basis of new information accommodation' (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.87) or compensates through a series of strategies to solve the problem (Corsaro, 2015, pp.11-12).

The descriptions of what a child could achieve at each step of Piaget's stage theory evolved throughout his long career. Highly published, not all of his works were translated into English and certainly Lourenço (2016, p.133) and Corsaro (2015, p.11) criticise the quality of translations which have led to received views of Piaget's theories and miscomprehensions particularly around the meaning of 'equilibration'.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998, pp.17-18) criticise Piaget for outlining a 'path to intelligence' for this 'poor biological creature'. They see the stages theory as mapping a route from low to high status, from incapacity and incompetence to competence and the 'real state of human being, namely being 'grown-up', and question whether Piaget's 'genetic epistemology' has resulted in today's focus on testing, ranking and evaluating children against 'normal' standards.

The stages theory characterises children's developmental changes at a 'very abstract, content neutral level of description' according to Carey, Zaitchik and Bascandzhev (2015). They do not believe that all aspects of his theory have stood the test of time, but that it is still relevant to contemporary discourse, although the conversation has changed due to progress in understanding around cognitive science and neuroscience. Miller (2011, p.668) agreed that Piagetian work has shaped contemporary research in this field and that he 'asked the right questions about development'.

Corsaro (2015, p.10) also believes Piaget's work is important as it 'reminds us that children perceive and organise their worlds in ways qualitatively different from the ways of adults'. Equally, Lourenço (2016) argues for the existence of these developmental stages as a 'useful heuristic' and a 'clearer conceptual tool than other putative devices' such as levels, periods or phases. This suggests that, for the researcher, any effort to try to understand children's worlds and the way in which they make sense of it, or use information from adult's worlds, must consider the level of cognitive development of the child at that point in order to tailor the research approach.

Piaget is not the only theorist to help us to understand how children develop by age or stage. Vygotsky, born in the same year as Piaget, did not enjoy the same popularity in his short lifetime, but his ideas contributed a great deal to today's teaching styles in primary education (ages 4 to 11) where children learn from their peers as well as their teachers. Vygotsky believed, like Piaget, that children's knowledge comes from their own personal experience, but he also proposed that it is located in society, through their families, communities, social class status, culture and education (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.100).

Whereas Piaget believed children could not reach the next stage of development before they were developmentally ready, Vygotsky's view was that through observation and scaffolding learning, children could be stretched by following the example of their teachers or peers (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.101). The key difference between these two constructivist approaches is that Piaget looked at children's development as individualistic whereas Vygotsky considered it collective in that children develop their cognitive, communicative, and emotional skills from interacting with other children and adults (Corsaro, 2015, pp.13-17).

Erikson's Eight Ages of Man, a 20th century version of the Middle Ages pseudo-scientific axiom, is a theory of psychosocial development that examines the corner stones of emotional and social development for all humans. Beginning with birth, Erikson believed the early years are critical times when trust, autonomy and initiative need to be developed. These milestones lay the foundations for the next developmental stage (Garhart Mooney, 2013, pp.53-76) but leave room for 'variations in tempo and intensity' (Erikson, 1951, p.246). Erikson's theory was originally published in the 1950s at a time when child rearing was militarised to precision timing and with less emotional understanding of the needs of young children. His view of the stages of emotional development for young children were more akin to today's emotionally responsive and child-led approaches.

Although baby-led (attachment parenting) and positive parenting approaches are being promoted in the UK today (NCT, 2017; NSPCC, 2016), we cannot say that children's emotional development is better served in line with Erikson's theory than in the 1950s. Childhood poverty and social issues are still prevalent, with 2.1 million 10 to 17-year-old children in the UK living in households struggling with their bills; 100,000 without their own bed; and 450,000 using a food bank (The Children's Society, 2017).

Researchers planning interviews with children should therefore be aware that some may not have attained strong foundations in psychosocial development and may be more likely to mistrust (birth to 12 months stage), feel shame (1-3 years), lack initiative (3-6 years), or feel inferior (6-11 years). However, Erikson's model acknowledges, unlike Piaget, that there could be strong differences or deficiencies in an individual's progress through the stages, and that personality weaknesses can be worked upon at a later stage.

Bruner (1964) also considered the stages of cognitive growth with the intellectual stages depending on the previous for its development; moving from enactive (representing past events through a motor response e.g., learning to ride a bike) to iconic (the selective organisation of images and percepts) and finally to symbolic representations. He comments that the 'growth of intellect is not smoothly monotonic' (1964, p.13) but moves in 'spurts as innovations are adopted'. Although this model is less helpful when considering how to conduct

market research studies with children, it again uses a stage-gate process to show the cognitive development of the young to adulthood lending support for Piaget's general principles.

Models of childhood development continue to evolve as cognitive scientists and neuroscientists explore the specific activities taking place in the brain at each stage of development. Although Piaget's work has been tested and critiqued many times, the core tenets endure (James and Prout, 1997, p.12), and even today, we use his language by praising young children for reaching a certain 'stage' of development.

2.1.4 CONCEPTUALISING CHILDHOOD

The conceptualisation of childhood has changed over time alongside societal views of children. The field of developmental psychology provided the foundations for understanding children, engaging them in tests and lab experiments 'interpreted by adults alone, according to adult criteria' (Pinter and Zandian, 2014, p.65). Children were viewed as 'passive' apprentices learning how to conform to the fixed 'rules, roles and modes of conduct' for adult behaviour, or else risk delinquency (Schildkrout, 1978, pp.344-345). James and Prout (1997, p.11) go further claiming children were 'marginalised beings awaiting temporal passage, through the acquisition of cognitive skill, into the social world of adults'.

Attitudes towards children in the social sciences began to change in the late 1970s to mid-1980s with Schildkrout (1978, pp.344-345) suggesting more focus on the interrelationship between children and adults, and Chaput Waksler (1986, p.63) challenging the status of children in research, proposing that rather than thinking of them as 'precognitive', 'immature' or 'under-developed', they were just 'different'.

The conversation about children's research in the sociological field of literature changed in the 1990s. Qvortrup (1994, pp.4-5) took the approach of treating children as 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings'. He saw children as inescapably dependent on adults, but not 'of second order'. The 'dominant framework' was challenged by James and Prout (1997) who also recognised the child as a 'being' and rejected the concept of 'becoming'. They disagreed that the child should have an 'assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.207) and should in fact be recognised in his or her own right. Lee (2001, pp.36-37) proposed that this division between 'beings' and 'becomings' could be described as 'complete and independent', versus 'incomplete and dependent'. He suggested that the being/becoming distinction was based on historical views when children were thought of as 'unstable, changeable embodiments of the future' versus the stability of adulthood, where adults knew their place.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) conceptualised childhood with four different subject positions: the socially constructed child (child as a product of his time and material conditions); the social structural child (childhood is a constant structural category in time and space); the minority group child (child who is structurally differentiated within society, with rights and status identity); and tribal child (child as an anthropological unit with its own culture, signs, symbols and rituals within a socio-historical setting). These positions offer useful ways to frame children's research studies, but there are overlaps rather than distinct differences between the four classifications, so it may be difficult to select just one approach.

Mayall (2002) provided a different conceptualisation drawing on three aspects to explain childhood as an intergenerational relational category, namely, history; agency and structure; and generation. Mayall took the standpoint that children are a minority social group to consider the impact of history on the positioning of children and childhood in a culture or country. Certainly, as has been discussed earlier in the chapter, scholars had been dismissive of work on children, and as noted in the Introduction chapter, it is still minimally covered in the top marketing journals today. Mayall looks at the importance of generation, from children being part of a social generation, to its relationship with adulthood, and as people located historically in a specific time period. The final strand is agency and structure, principally the ideologies, policies and practices that control children's lives, both at home and school, and how children's and adults' agency is used 'through their interrelations to reproduce or modify childhood' (Idem, p.39).

Although Montgomery agrees with Mayall that 'child' is a relational term, she argues that childhood cannot be universally conceptualised as a 'specific stage of life, separated from adulthood' (2009, pp.54-55). She believes there are stages of development beyond puberty and marriage in some cultures that have no point of comparison with Western models of development.

Both James, Jenks and Prout (1998) and Mayall (2002) share a common vision of the conceptualisation of childhood: seeing children as active beings; as being a product of their time and generation; and existing in their social world within a structural category. Indeed, Corsaro (2015, p.7) wrote that constructivist and interpretive perspectives suggest children and adults are active agents in the social construction of childhood, compared to traditional approaches that consider children to be consumers of a culture created by adults. He proposed that children do not 'just internalise the society they are born into' but can enact societal change. This resonates particularly with the current generation of digital natives who are seemingly using technology to forge their own path and curate their own childhood.

2.1.5 THE AGENCY OF CHILDREN

If children are 'beings' rather than 'becomings', are they capable of real participation in research studies? The alternatives to participation are observation of the child's behaviour or proxy reporting where the parent, guardian, or teacher answers on behalf of the child. Both alternative methods have limitations: observation on its own fails to identify reasons for specific behaviour and proxy reporting is criticised for being less accurate than self-reports (Ridolfo and Maitland, 2011).

Involving children in research about their own lives and giving them the opportunity to express their own views is a recognition of their agency, a term that Giddens describes as 'moral responsibility' (1993, p.79). This reconceptualization acknowledges that children are active participants in society (James, 2009, p.34) constructing their own cultures in the structural form of childhood (Corsaro, 2015, p.4).

In Charlotte Hardman's seminal article on the potential anthropology of children (1973, p.87), she boldly proposed that children are 'muted voices', people worthy of study in their own right, and talked of her desire to discover if childhood is a 'self-regulating, autonomous world' with a culture separate to that of adults. Hendrick (2008, p.42) claimed that in published work to

date, children had been denied a ‘voice and, an essential feature of human identity, a rational standpoint’. He referred to adultism where children are viewed as ‘less than adults’ and in a ‘state of becoming’. A term that Flasher (1978, p.1) defined as an unfair power play where adults see children as ‘so different that they constitute a separate species’.

Although the pace of change in attitude towards children was slow, it was steered at an international level by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which came into force in September 1990 setting out the civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights that children are entitled to, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, language or ability (UNICEF, 2017). The convention was adopted by the UK in 1992. Together with the 1989 UK Children’s Act (c.41), these new pieces of legislation shifted ideas about childhood to allow children new rights and give them a voice. James, Jenks and Prout (1998, pp.67-70) believe the Act positioned the child as a ‘social and political actor, a person with opinions, a decision-maker’. Jones (2009, p.6) commented that the change, both of attitude and practice, meant children were seen in ‘their own right and as having rights, not as proto-adults or as the property of parents’, certainly an enormous step change from previous views of the child. Jones usefully summarises those new and traditional attitudes to children, as seen in Table 3: Emerging and Traditional Attitudes to Children.

Table 3: Emerging and Traditional Attitudes to Children

Emerging view – The Child as:		Traditional approach – The Child as:
capable	rather than	incapable
active	rather than	passive
visible	rather than	invisible
powerful	rather than	vulnerable and needy
valued and attended to in the present	rather than	seen and attended to as an investment for the future
an individual with their own capacities	rather than	a mini-adult lacking in full adult capacities

Source: Jones (2009, p.29)

The conceptual repositioning of children as social and political agents is an acknowledgement that children play a part in shaping their own childhood, however culturally and socially diverse that experience might be. No longer are they passive bystanders or products of ‘universal biological and social processes’ (James and James, 2004, pp.23-27). They are active agents of change, documenting their childhoods and curating content online to reflect their personalities, beliefs and life goals (Palfrey and Gasser, 2016). The nomenclature of different generations, from X to Y and Z (The Centre for Generational Kinetics, 2016), is based upon those perceived characteristics that define and differences that separate us from each other as shaped by our formative years.

Has this repositioning truly granted children active agency? James and James (2004, pp.23-27) commented that if children were passive then the need for different forms of control and intervention would not be put in place. They believe that children’s actions may have consequences, whether that be intended or not, that adults wish to control and that children may act differently to what adults expect. Mayall (2002, p.21) acknowledged the unequal power relationship but stated that childhood agency has to be examined ‘within the parameters of childhood’s minority status’ considering that children, at this stage of their life, do need

protection and naturally have less knowledge, maturity and strength. The role of power relationships, particularly in the research encounter, is explored further in Chapter 3.1.

Can all children be considered as active agents? The age at which children are seen as competent or capable of undertaking different tasks can vary enormously, both across cultures and over time. In 2016, 72.3 million children aged 5 to 11 worldwide were working, of which 19 million were in hazardous work (International Labour Office, 2017). Now, compare this to a YouGov survey (2012) of 1,715 UK adults who said on average a child should be 10 years old before they walk to school on their own. Although children may be seen as competent in some areas, Montgomery (2009, p.56) believes they are often considered to lack other elements of adult status, such as 'a sense of wrong or right, a sense of appropriate behaviour, or knowledge of their status and their role in their community'.

Access to children as research participants is granted by the parent or adult acting in loco parentis, therefore the views of the guardian are important as to whether they believe the child can contribute independently. Montgomery (2009, p.61) refers to a 1994 study by McCarthy who studied how UK mothers conceptualise their children. A third of mothers thought of their children as 'little people' acknowledging their individuality and their rights as a person, although 'constrained by size, maturity and adult behaviour'. Certainly, children today, are granted more autonomy in their use of digital devices (as seen in Chapter 2.3) which can be used for data collection purposes. Self-regulation has never been so important for children; another way in which Piaget's work has remained relevant with his theory of 'equilibration' (1964).

The choice of research methods can facilitate or create a barrier to children's independent participation and their right to have a voice. Methods that embrace children's agency view them as 'capable, competent agents involved in decision-making and having opinions that count and that are acted upon' (Jones, 2009, p.170). These methods can be participatory in nature and this topic is explored further in Chapter 3.2.

Changes in legislation have granted children rights, and developments in the status of children have moved them from the position of a minority group not worthy of research consideration, to a sociological discipline in their own right with the rapid growth of Childhood Studies. Mandell (1998, p.40) talked of 'suspending the ontological terms of child and adult' in order to participate in children's social world as a child (discussed further in Chapter 3.1). If we take an interpretivist approach and agree that children are social and political actors creating social phenomena, that they are active agents for change, and that they exist in the structural and temporal form of childhood that is constantly evolving, then it is argued, we can say that children do have their own voice. Children can be independent of thought and independent of an adult in terms of their behaviour, attitudes, likes and dislikes. They are therefore worthy of investigation and can be researched in their own right within this branding study to establish their personal preferences and independent relationships with brands.

2.1.6 NEW THEORIES OF CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT?

Traditional theories of developmental research have sat in two camps: firstly, 'nativist' theories of development, where development relates to 'natural processes of maturation' and secondly, 'environmentalist' theories where learning and experience influence development. Piaget sees

development as the maturing child 'constructing an internal representation of their environment' and Vygotsky understands the 'role of social processes and cultural tools' within learning (Woodhead, 2009, pp.48-50); both theories sit somewhere between the nativist and the environmentalist approach. The growing availability of data from longitudinal studies on children from the 1970s onwards, and translations of key works by authors like Piaget and Vygotsky, saw challenges to the experiments upon which these theories are based, concluding that there are no universal laws about children (Woodhead, 2009, p.50). Although childhood is 'united by the universal biology of human physical development and cognitive potential' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.59), it is differentiated by varied social and cultural experiences.

Despite criticism, developmental theories have continued to inspire academic researchers, particularly in the fields of cognitive science and neuroscience. We know that childhood is changing, rapidly, due to the digital age with children's lives 'mediated by technology' (Palfrey and Gasser, 2016, p.2) and a seemingly faster route to consumerisation (WARC, 2016; Clough, 2016). Stage theories of child development are a useful heuristic (Lourenço, 2016) for marketers and researchers, but do they reflect children's current cognitive and physical development. Are children growing up faster in other ways too?

2.1.6.1 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Puberty is a key measure of physical development for children. Health researchers, particularly in the UK and USA, have been tracking boys' and girls' 'biological processes that occur in the transition between childhood and adulthood' (Yousefi, et al., 2013, p.230) as the early onset of puberty can trigger a range of adverse medical and social outcomes in adolescence and middle age (Kelly, et al., 2017).

A study by Herman-Giddens, et al., (2012) examined boys (4,131 in the USA) as part of a well-child scheme across the country finding that they appear to be developing from six months to two years earlier than 'commonly used norms', with African American boys ahead of White and Hispanic. Another USA study by Biro, et al., (2010) using anthropometric measurements taken by trained examiners indicated that at 7 years old, 10.4% of White, 23.4% of Black and 14.9% of Hispanic girls had early stages of breast development. Researchers found higher proportions of girls developing breasts at a much earlier age than 10 to 30 years ago.

Yousefi, et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study in the Isle of Wight with the 1989-1990 birth cohort, recontacting 1,313 participants at the age of 18 asking them to recall the age they experienced puberty triggers such as body hair growth, skin changes, etc. The researchers discovered the median age for body hair and breast growth was 12.0 with menarche at 13.0. For boys, body hair growth triggered puberty at 13.0 years, followed by voice and skin changes at 14.0. This was a substantial sample, but it is likely that recall may not be entirely accurate.

The menarche in girls is seen as a particular indicator for earlier physical development and researchers have been trying to establish whether it is occurring at an earlier age than in previous decades. A UK based longitudinal study of puberty triggers for 5,839 girls (Kelly, et al., 2017) looked for associations with ethnicity, family income, adiposity (storage of body fat) and psychosocial stress. They found that 9.5% of girls aged 11 had started menstruation (as reported by their mothers). Kelly, et al., (2017) criticised studies that use breast development

and pubic hair growth as markers of puberty, due to the subjectivity of the measures and the need to examine children to assess them. According to The UK Millennium Cohort Study on which they based their findings, the median age for periods starting in the UK is 12.9 years. They found that girls from disadvantaged groups and some ethnic minority groups are most likely to develop early onset puberty, with the age of puberty lowering dramatically over the 20th century in high income countries (Idem, p.232).

Dr Mark Porter, writing for The Times (2010), supported this trend commenting that the average age for the onset of puberty in British girls has fallen from 14 to approximately 10 in the past two centuries due to better health, living conditions and an improved diet. Conversely, he cites a poor diet resulting in childhood obesity as one cause of early onset menstruation.

Teachers and doctors in the UK have also reported a trend in the early onset of physical development (Finlay, Jones and Coleman, 2002, p.207). One teacher commented: 'Girls are much more street wise and sexually aware than previously. I feel this is due to changing values or society, advertising, films and peer pressure, as well as freer relationships'. Looking at boys, only 19% of teachers, 23% of doctors, and 16% of paediatricians in the study felt boys were maturing earlier but as one teacher said, 'the changes in boys are less obvious - we have no idea'.

These studies found that children are developing earlier over time due to better living conditions but whereas in the past, poorer children developed later due to malnutrition and other health and lifestyle factors, now those from lower socioeconomic groups are developing earlier. It appears that ethnicity plays a part in earlier development as does gender. The changes are not just physical, teachers report that girls are more sexually aware due to societal conditions. The maturation of children - from the physical, to the emotional, and the cognitive sophistication has implications for traditional theories of childhood development.

2.1.6.2 FINE MOTOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

From infancy, our primitive reflexes (behavioural motor responses seen in normal early development which are later 'suppressed but not lost during maturation') provide us with the tools to fulfil our physiological needs (Schott and Rossor, 2003). From the palmar grip reflex when a baby tightly grasps the finger that is brushed against its palm, through refinements of hand-eye coordination, to the pincer grip when objects are held between thumb and finger: these milestones show the development of critical fine motor skills.

Young children accustomed to using smartphones and tablets will, when given a device, instinctively reverse the pincer grip - where an opposable thumb and one-digit touch - and swipe the screen open. Can we therefore consider that the normal pattern of childhood development has changed in the digital age with children demonstrating the 'capacity to adjust' (Massey, 2013) and the swipe becoming an adaptive trait in human development?

A systematic literature review by Chien, Brown and McDonald (2009) synthesized 41 existing hand tests and expert review to create a Children's Hand Skills Framework. They categorised the reverse pincer grip (the swipe) and 'isolated finger movements' when tapping on a screen or typing on a keyboard as 'object-related hand skill involving adaptive skilled hand use' (Ibid, p.878). The authors classify the 'swipe' and other finger movements involved with using

smartphones and tablets as a sophisticated demonstration of hand-skills and associated quality (relating to dexterity, accuracy and technical skills).

Research by Price, Jewitt and Crescenzi (2015, p.140) looked at the benefits and limitations of the use of touch screen technologies in pre-school learning, discovering that while the iPad 'did not engender new forms of touch movements', it did encourage more mark-making (the first form of writing). The authors suggested early engagement with touch screens may 'foster the development' of digital literacy skills such as swiping, but they also restricted the use of 'multiple digits and hands in touch-based contexts' in favour of more index finger interaction. This suggests that although the use of touch screen technologies encourages object-related hand skill involving adapted skilled hand use (Chien, Brown and McDonald, 2009, p.878), it discourages object-related hand skills involving bimanual use, namely transferring objects from hand to hand and using both hands simultaneously and cooperatively. Neumann (2016) also found a link between tablet writing and emergent literacy, but suggested further research was needed to understand the effect of writing with a finger on a touch screen versus typing on a pop-up keyboard.

Gaul and Issartel (2016) were more concerned about the 'role and impact of modern society on fine motor skills development' (which include hand skills). Their research on 7 to 11-year-old Irish children, demonstrated that only the youngest met the expected levels of fine motor skill proficiency, and all age groups failed to meet the expected rate of progression given by normative data.

Paton (2014) reported in the Daily Telegraph concerns about the effects of smart screen technologies from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers who had identified rising numbers of children 'unable to perform simple tasks such as using building blocks because of overexposure to iPads' that had affected both the dexterity in their fingers and their memory; in other words, their fine motor skills and capability for cognitive thinking.

These studies imply that touch screens do support the development of digital skills and are linked to emergent writing in young children and while bimanual dexterity in hand skills may be hindered by swiping, it seems adapted skilled hand use has improved. Of course, the use of smart screen technologies may not be the only lifestyle factor affecting fine motor skills development in this generation. Louv (2005, cited in Moss, 2012, p.4) questioned if developmental delays might be due to sedentary habits with children playing less frequently outside due to 'well-meaning, protective house arrest'. However, Plowman, Stephen and McPake (2010, p.23) were critical of the seeming bias of effects research claiming it is 'rarely interested in possible links between media use and desirable outcomes'.

2.1.6.3 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' concerns in 2014, about the potential impact of touch screen technologies on cognitive development, reinforces points made by Carr (2010, p.138) who claimed the internet is 'chipping away' at 'capacity and concentration', and Margalit (2016) who referred to 'troubling studies' in the USA which connected delayed cognitive development in children with 'extended exposure to electronic media'.

Palfrey and Gasser (2016, pp.147-152) describe digital natives as 'extraordinarily sophisticated and strangely narrow' which they claim is due to the psychological effects of

'information overload' which can cause the physical symptoms of stress and limits the 'ability of young people to make good decisions in certain contexts'. This is supported by Sandy Greenberg of New York communications agency Terri & Sandy (cited by Ward, 2016) who called Generation Z 'millennials on steroids' because of their incessant multi-screen multi-tasking.

Research in the USA by Grissmer, et al., (2010) determined that attention, fine motor skills and general knowledge are the strongest predictors at kindergarten entrance (equivalent of Year 1 in the UK for children aged 5-6) for later achievement in maths, reading and science. Is the use of smart screen technologies therefore hindering young children's potential or helping them? The UK education system's focus on testing children at a young age to test progress in schools could lead to an increasing pressure on parents to limit screen time. Digital has unlocked a new world for children and now that box is open, it appears unlikely that it could be closed, however brand marketers targeting young consumers via digital channels should take heed to keep the government, parents, educators, health professionals and society on side.

2.1.7 A NEW CHILDHOOD?

It appears that digital natives are growing up faster in terms of physical and sexual development, and differently in terms of the way their fine skills and literacy develop. Girls appear, on the surface at least, to be more streetwise and sophisticated. Socioeconomic factors, gender, ethnicity, and weight are all contributing factors to faster maturation. Children are given more freedom in the digital world than they are in the real world, and are engaging with product categories much faster than in previous generations, but are they really as developed in a cognitive sense as they might seem?

While our understanding of the cognitive processes that take place within each stage, as identified by Piaget (1964) continue to evolve, the theory remains useful as a heuristic to researchers conducting studies on children, providing guidance on the likely level of evaluative and processing skills.

As Garhart Mooney (2013) and James, Jenks and Prout (1998) said, the stages model is designed for use with the average developing child and there will be differences between children because of developmental progress, gender, cultural and social differences. There are no universal laws about children but Piaget's model and Vygotsky's views on social and cultural experiences, provide a useful framework for thinking about the stage of development that a child participating in a marketing research study might have reached, in terms of their commercial sophistication, and the best way to approach research with them in terms of their understanding and capabilities. Erikson (1951) reminds us that not all children will have enjoyed a positive start to their psychosocial development, and we should design research inclusively to ensure all children can participate equally when discussing their social worlds.

James and James (2004, p.27) do not explicitly name Piaget but criticised traditional theories of development as 'pre-determined and linked to age, leaving little room for children to assert any individuality, except as forms of deviance'. Recognising that children have active agency, and experience childhood differently based on a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors, researchers should not be rigid in their approach when using the stages theory as a heuristic.

It may prove a useful guide for initial planning but once in field, observation of the child, as recommended by Vygotsky (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p.102), will help the researcher by intuit the right language to use and how the child makes sense of the world.

Today's digital child is indeed a product of its time and socioeconomic conditions. History and technology have helped develop this active being who is now reinventing the structure of childhood through the way in which children interact with adults, technology, and the world around them. It is not just a social world; it is a digital world.

2.2 A CHILD-SIZED APPROACH TO CONSUMER SOCIALISATION

Ward (1974, p.2) defined socialisation as the 'processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace' and his influential article on children's consumer socialisation provided strong argument for further study into this field.

To fully understand the development of this field of literature, we can return to the historical origins of consumer socialisation for children which align with changing perceptions of the home and women's work (Hardman, 1973; Mayall, 2002). A growing recognition of the value of education and women nurtured the 'dawn of individual consciousness' (Erikson, 1951, p.363) and this created a space where the commercial value of children and women's spending power could be realised. The first signs of this consumer market in the late nineteenth century were adverts for health, hygiene and medicine targeting the mother (Brusdal and Frønes, 2014).

In the Victorian era, childhood essentially ended for many lower-class children with 'the beginning of work' (Frost, 2009, p.74). The UK Government introduced compulsory elementary education (Elementary Education Act, 1870, 33&34 Vict., c.75) to limit child labour, but many children still worked and were viewed as 'national assets' (Frost, 2009, p.74). Victorian discipline was harsh, and children were strictly controlled at home, in the workplace and at school where 'social control' and instilling 'conformist values' were the order of the day (Digby and Searby, 1981, p.24; Foucault, 1977, p.147; Oswell, 2013, p.119). The limited time to play and be 'childlike' was valued by children and despite the tough treatment metered to the young, this was the era when a consumer culture targeting children began to grow (Frost, 2009, p.75).

Children's toys in this era were simple: marbles, wooden tops, cigarette cards, card games, board games like draughts or snakes and ladders, simple dolls, and stuffed animals. Well-to-do children enjoyed more sophisticated toys such as wooden horses, Noah's arks, soldiers, educational toys, and more lifelike dolls (Frost, 2009, pp.76-77).

Children's books and magazines were readily available after 1860 in England particularly as literacy grew. From 1890, department stores were becoming more widespread across the USA, Britain and Canada with specialist departments or sections focusing on children's goods with child height mirrors and fixtures (Cook, 2011, pp.332-4). Women and children were now encouraged to shop for pleasure (Frost, 2009, p.95). Advertisements and promotions showcased children's toys and the commercialisation of Christmas was in full swing with festive merchandising (Ibid). Playthings that were reminiscent of the parent's childhood were popular (Cross, 2004, p.194); even in Victorian times, nostalgia was a consumer trend.

Popular toys from this period like Noah's Ark remain unchanged to this day, and trains adopted their classic status as they moved from pull/push toys to being powered by clockwork or steam before electric became commonplace.

By the early twentieth century, there was a growing conflict between advertisers' and child development experts' view of children; to indulge or not to indulge. Cross (2004, pp.185-186) identifies the concept of the 'wondrous child' in commercials of the time with marketers selling the 'emotional value of children to parents'. Print advertising tapped into parents' desire to make their offspring happy by illustrating children whose faces were filled with 'wondrous' delight. The social value of children was now broadly seen in 'emotional rather than economic terms' (Cook, 2011, p.334). The image of the child was exploited with ads showing children 'teaching' their parents about new and innovative products such as electric trains or radiators (Cross, 2004, p.188). The romantic ideal of the child took hold by the middle of the twentieth century with an acceptance that 'children's desires were natural' and that fulfilling those wants would not damage them (Idem, p.184). That approach has held true since then; Buckingham (2011, p.229) said parents' consumption has come to carry meanings of 'love and care, and of longing and nostalgia'.

Evalyn Grumbine, an Assistant Publisher of Child Life Magazine, published a seminal article in 1938 on children's traits at different developmental stages with characteristics of toys and games specified for each age group (Cook, 2011, p.336). This was one of the first signs of developmental psychology and market research being used to shape the features of children's products. It was recognised that children's consumer needs and wants adjusted across the period of childhood.

By the 1960s, children were recognised as a consumer market in academic literature. McNeal published his seminal article entitled 'The Child Consumer: A New Market' discussing the 'new age-graded market' segment of children that was sizable with the desire and capability to buy (1969, pp.15-16). He acknowledged that children had previously been able to encourage 'the family to buy cereals, soft drinks and even automobiles' but now American children aged 5 to 13 were independently able to buy goods for their own satisfaction and consumption. He discussed advertisements aimed directly at children to 'buy so and so', and supermarkets targeting children with products displayed on lower shelves, small shopping trolleys and bicycle racks.

McNeal classed the age range of 5 to 13 as 'the apprenticeship period of consuming' (Idem, p.19) with children seeking independence in their purchasing behaviour, particularly through solo store visits, to prove 'grown-upness' and 'that he is now truly a consumer'. Of course, McNeal's description of young consumer learning with children shopping without their parents at the age of seven seems horrifying by today's helicopter parenting standards. Our parental fears have regressed consumer learning for children compared to previous generations. If today's children are not visiting bricks and mortar stores alone, then they are receiving less parental coaching and support than they would have received by physically shopping and undertaking small grocery errands as described by McNeal in 1969. The concern is that children are consuming online and taking part in commercial interactions via clicks and mortar stores and pure-play business models without that full 'apprenticeship period' of consumer learning. It is perhaps assumed by parents that because children cannot hold a credit or debit card, they are not consuming online, but of course adding items to a basket or wish list or

taking advantage of stored credit preferences follows almost all of the elements of the online consumer purchase process.

Towards the latter part of the twentieth century, parents appeared to be fully involved in the consumer socialisation of their children (Moschis, 1985, pp.898-913), teaching children 'rational aspects of consumption' such as price-quality relationships and managing money via purposive training, using positive and negative reinforcement, and allowing children to observe their parents' own consumer behaviour. Referring to literature from the 1970s and early 1980s, Moschis believed that parents also played a role in the development of children's brand preferences although he was unclear whether this was because of parental training or the convenience of having those brands in the home.

Interestingly, Moschis (Ibid) proposed further research into family communications to examine directions of influence beyond 'parents-children' to 'specific dyads' such as mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son and father-daughter, as well as 'one parent's style of communication with the child' to the other. With nearly 1.8m lone parent families with dependent children in the UK (ONS, 2017), and many more children living with stepparents, children's consumer learning today may be inhibited by additional and potentially conflicting (non-biological) parental influences. Equally, in contemporary society, gender and family unit composition are likely to impact on traditional dyad relationships and communications within the family. It would be useful to understand if children's consumer socialisation is still influenced by the family to the same degree and if it is affected by separated parents, changes in the family unit or gender. Indeed, Buckingham (2011, p.144) suggests that children's consumption is 'embedded in networks of social relationships' with parents acting as 'providers, enablers, regulators, gatekeepers [and] teachers'. These networks are likely to be increasingly complex.

John (1999, pp.183-213) relied heavily on Moschis work as she developed a conceptual framework of children's consumer socialisation from twenty-five years of academic research. This was based on children's developmental stages informed by Piaget's theories of cognitive development as discussed in Chapter 2.1.3.1, with the perceptual stage for children aged 3 to 7, analytical for those aged 7 to 11, and reflective for 11 to 16s. She proposed that these stages explained why 'younger children do not understand advertising's persuasive intent' and demonstrates 'shifts in knowledge development, decision-making skills and purchase influence strategies' (Idem, p.186). John proposed the following factors that contribute towards children's development as consumers: age, their social environment including parental types and communication patterns in the family and the presence/age/gender of siblings, peers, culture, mass media and other types of marketing (although this study was too early to see the influence of the internet on children).

2.2.1 CHALLENGES TO YOUNG CONSUMERISATION

As the twentieth century progressed, children became avid consumers of products and media. Postman took a critical stance towards the medium of television (1994, p.79) considering it a 'primitive but irresistible alternative' to the written word and proposed that children's programming did not exist, as it was all 'undifferentiated in its accessibility'. This ease of accessing the same information underpinned his argument that the 'innocence' of childhood (Idem, p.85) was disappearing with an erosion of the 'dividing line' between child and

adulthood, essentially that children were being 'expelled from the garden of childhood' (Idem, p.97).

This treatise, written by the American educator and cultural critic who was known for his concerns about the role of technology in society, was written at the cusp of the digital, or as we knew it then 'new media' revolution. Postman died in 2003 so one can only imagine what he would have thought about the relatively uncontrolled use of digital devices by primary school aged children (aged 4 to 11 in the UK). While arguments have been made that childhood has not ended and is a continual and evolving social construct (see Chapter 2.1.2), it is certainly true that children have more access to information and entertainment than at any point in modern history. While some of that may be targeting children, much is certainly 'undifferentiated' (e.g., YouTube content) and is accessible at the click of a button or the reverse pincer grip swipe of little thumbs and fingers.

Cook (2011, p.336) took the view that childhood was not disappearing but acknowledged that the relationship between children and their parents regarding media activities and consumption has changed. With the rise of product licensing, children's 'toys, stories, clothing, media, food, and games are awash in commercial meaning, brands and icons' (Ibid).

Buckingham (2011, p.226) was also pragmatic in his acknowledgement that 'childhood (like adulthood) does not and cannot exist outside of market relations' in a 'capitalist economy'. He acknowledged the challenge parents face (Idem, p.143) between being viewed as a 'permissive parent' who is 'surrendering to their children's apparently uncontrollable consumer desires' versus the 'responsible parent' who struggles to 'contain and control their children's exposure to marketing and commercial values'. He supported the view that education could help children to understand the 'commercial market' but should not be used as a 'form of inoculation or a source of moralistic warnings about evil marketers'.

The consumer socialisation of children has been driven by parents and brands since the early twentieth century but critics like Postman (1994), Cook (2011) and Buckingham (2011) all acknowledged that the relationship had fundamentally changed between children, media activities and consumption leaving parents less in control than before. Parents are increasingly scared for all aspects of their children's lives. Research by Playday (2013) showed that 35% of parents do not feel children are safe to play outside without an adult because of traffic, community attitudes and stranger danger, so children are less likely to receive the consumer apprenticeship described by McNeal (1969), but while parents do not necessarily want to curtail children's use of digital devices to learn about the commercial world (Clarke, 2011), panic can quickly build and spread e.g. the Momo suicide game on Peppa Pig and Fortnite YouTube content in Spring 2019 which may or may not have been a hoax. This all suggests that perhaps the greatest challenge to young consumerisation is that parents know they are no longer in control and children are in the driving seat.

2.2.2 YOUNG CONSUMERISATION IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Supporting the findings from Moschis (1985) and John (1999), Dotson and Hyatt (2005, p.36) identified three major socialisation agents (parents, peers and mass media) that had traditionally been seen to influence children's consumer behaviour. Their research on children aged 8-16 in the USA resulted in five influence factors: irrational social influence; the

importance of television; familial influence; the value of shops; and brands. They suggested these factors varied according to the child's age, gender, amount of spending money, how they spent their time after school, and their media consumption (television). The research indicated that younger children, those with less spending money, and those who spent time after school with adults were the most influenced by their parents.

Despite providing supporting statistics to show the growing importance of the internet as a medium for Generation Y at the time (Idem, p.40), the study did not ask children about the influence of the internet as a socialisation agent. While this study does not account for digital advances, it does provide a very useful indication of the direction of travel with children's changing media lifestyles and suggests that demographics and lifestyle characteristics impact upon traditional consumer socialisation models.

Subsequent studies do support Dotson and Hyatt's belief (2005, pp. 35-42) that the consumer socialisation process, how children become consumers, would change in the digital world. As they predicted, the internet is now a 'major agent' in that process (Thaichon, 2017, p.45; Confos and Davis, 2016, p.1995; Chitakunye, 2012, p.218) and the prevalence of children with their own social media profiles means 'virtual friends' (Thaichon, 2017, p.39) could also be an influential source of information about brands.

As discussed later in this chapter, children should not legally be using social media before the age of 13 (even though they do) and the term 'virtual friends' has become synonymous with 'paedophile' in the minds of parents (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2018). In reality, children's 'virtual friends' are most likely to be, as Facebook styles it, 'friends of friends', which could be their friend's cousins, neighbours, school friends, etc., who have commented on or liked their posts. Of course, children should not be encouraged by marketing communications to feel that they are 'lacking in courage, duty or loyalty' if they do not encourage other children or adults to buy a product (The Committee of Advertising Practice, 2014) but certainly, there is indicative evidence that 'real life' or 'virtual' friends are an important influence in children's consumerisation, if not the most important influence. Thaichon's study also suggests that society's traditional definition of 'a friend' is changing for children.

This is not to say that the family's role as agents in the child socialisation process, as indicated by John (1999), Moschis (1985) and Buckingham (2011), has disappeared. More recent research by Kerrane, Bettany and Kerrane (2015, pp.729-731) explored the influence of siblings as a socialisation agent, particularly as an 'up to date opinion leader' and 'important checking mechanism for children before their consumption choices are exposed to friends'. Interestingly, this did not lead to all children copying their sibling as some purposefully carved out 'alternative consumption identities' such as following principles of sustainability. Kerrane and Hogg (2013, p.518) also found that children inter-generationally influence their siblings' adoption of 'technically complex products'. This suggests that siblings may be far greater an influence as socialisation agents than parents are today.

In the digital world, with these new and powerful socialisation influences, children appear to be confident consumers. Chitakunye (2012, p.218) discovered in a multi-method, active participation research study that children (aged 13-17) are able to 'express their views' around consumption clearly. Likewise, Thaichon (2017, p.45) found from a similarly aged group (from 12-15) that children were using their 'power of expertise' in online shopping to 'exert a greater

impact on family purchases'. Research by Refuel, a US youth marketing agency (cited in Ward, 2016) indicated that Generation Z are already playing a more significant role in high involvement family purchasing decisions, with parents turning to the oldest segment of this generational group for advice and input, and with young people enjoying significant spending power of their own with higher levels of pocket money/allowance than in previous groups.

All these studies support the idea that children and teens are empowered consumers from a young age. Thaichon's study also found that technology was enabling 'reverse socialization' to take place as children share their technical expertise with their parents, as well as siblings according to Kerrane and Hogg (2013, p.518). Consumer training for online commercial interactions is therefore taking place between the parent and child, the child and parent, and the child and siblings. This confidence in children's abilities must be treated with caution. It is clear from McNeal's work (1969) that the 'apprenticeship period' of consumer learning, with children taking incremental steps in the journey to consumerisation through undertaking errands, has been stunted by the contraction of children's real-life personal geographies (due to physical safety concerns), whilst children's online and independent consumer behaviour has extended into the unbounded and often unchecked virtual space, where virtual friends are most likely to influence their consumer activity. Parents are frequently reminded to teach their children about the dangers of the internet (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2018), but are they teaching their children to navigate the online commercial world as trainee consumers?

2.2.3 YOUNG MINDS AND COMMERCIAL MESSAGES

Chitakunye (2012) proposes that our understanding of family decision-making processes and children's role within that decision-making unit is embedded in traditional theories of consumer socialisation theory and parental influence. This reinforces the idea that parents teach their children to be consumers sharing 'consumption skills, knowledge, tastes, and preferences' (Idem, p.208) and children move from a position of no knowledge to becoming informed consumers. Pester power might suggest children are actively engaged in influencing purchase decisions, but parents hold the power in 'granting or refusing' their children's appeals returning them to a position of passive consumption (Ibid). Chitakunye identified that more research into children's consumption practices was needed from the child's perspective; authentic voices from active participants rather than parents' 'distortions or misrepresentations' (Ibid). Indeed, Chitakunye suggested that if children can 'actively change their parents' beliefs and attitudes' (Idem, p.209), then consumer socialisation may be occurring in both directions, between parent and child, and child and parent; this is supported by Thaichon (2017). This is clearly a point of view which resonates well with this study's aim and objectives, earlier discussions on the new sociology of childhood throughout Chapter 2.1, and subsequent discourse in children's rapid adoption of communications technology in Chapter 2.3.

Through active participation techniques, Chitakunye (2018, p.219) realised the importance of 'children's self-assertion' in consumption and market research, suggesting that marketers could commercially benefit from this if they used these techniques to understand what children really need and want. Children's assertion to 'have their say' as 'active agents arguing for their own desires' can be seen as part of modern family life (Brusdal and Frønes, 2014, pp.118-135) with negotiations ranging from the everyday FMCG purchase to high ticket items like cars, holidays and a new home.

Valkenburg and Buijzen's study (2005, p.466) indicated that children begin recognising commercial messages at a very early age, with children recognising brand logos from the age of 2, and significantly more by the age of 8. They found that the propensity to recognise brands was based on age, parental brand awareness, peer influence, and television exposure. Valkenburg and Buijzen expressed concern that exposing ever younger children to commercial messaging, particularly via dedicated children's programming with associated licensing opportunities i.e., Teletubbies, required greater ethical consideration for marketers. We can consider that exposure to advertisements on commercial television has now been surpassed by digital channels, such as display ads on websites, apps, or social media. This study will examine whether young children are able to recognise brand logos as extensively as in Valkenburg and Buijzen's 2005 study, and the sources of that knowledge. It will also establish how well protected children are from these commercial messages.

A later study by two of the authors (Rozendaal, Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2011) tested whether children in the Netherlands understood advertisers' intended advertising effects, such as ad/product recall, learning or liking using strategies such as ad repetition, humour, product demonstration, peer popularity appeal, celebrity endorsement, and the use of premiums. An adult benchmark was used with the survey of 209 children aged 8-12. In this study, the authors aimed to investigate developmental progress in children's understanding of advertisers' tactics and the point at which this understanding matched an adult level of literacy. Their findings showed that children show a growing understanding of the 'selling intent of advertising' at 8 and a significant increase in understanding of the 'persuasive intent' at 10. This matched the adult level of understanding in this sample. Compared to previous studies cited by the authors (Boush, Friestad and Rose, 1994; Rozendaal, Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2010), the results suggest that children have become more literate at a younger age. This study used television advertising, so it is unclear whether children's increased literacy and ability to interpret commercial messages translates to the digital environment where they are now most likely to spend time absorbing videos and other rich content.

In fact, Generation Z are predicted to be the biggest threat to television as the traditional channel of choice for advertisers, according to Joan Sinopoli, VP Brand Solutions, at research agency Nielsen (cited by Aitken, 2016) with this generation favouring video-streaming subscriptions. Ofcom (2016) statistics reveal that 37% of 3-4s, 54% of 5-7s, 73% of 8-11s, and 87% of 12-15s use the YouTube website or app.

Children today are watching hours and hours of completely absorbing and entertaining video content. YouTube vloggers like Zoella (with 11.3 million subscribers as of 22/06/2020 and second channel Zoe Sugg with 4.82 million subscribers) and her brother ThatcherJoe (7.89 million as of 22/06/2020) are now powerful personal brands wielding huge influence over young consumers, particularly tweens aged 8-12, with their enthusiastic blend of entertaining lifestyle, social and commercial video content. These vlogging siblings became so famous, they were made into waxwork figures at London's tourist attraction, Madame Tussauds. The phenomenal popularity of 'unboxing' videos (Kelly, 2014) where a new toy or product is unwrapped or revealed on camera, most often by other children, have also proved to be irresistible to even younger children. Equally, game run-throughs and tips are watched by boys and girls alike such as 'IamSanna' who has 4.3 million YouTube subscribers for her Roblox gaming videos; Roblox is an online gaming platform and game creation system that is very popular with children.

Toddlers to tweens are therefore being exposed to: product placement; advertorial and sponsored content including 'unboxing' toys, games and sweets, and demonstrating 'hauls' of products e.g., Zoella's Autumn Wardrobe (Zoella, 2017); pre-roll video ads; and ads that appear in the search results or alongside a playing video. Do children even understand that they are watching commercial content when a vlogger, who may even be a child of their own age, is enthusiastically telling them how good a toy or game is to play?

Searching for content that entertains and absorbs them can also lead to children developing their own interests and passions. Lindstrom (2008, pp.103-106) talks of his own childhood obsession with collecting Lego and attributes this type of behaviour to rituals which give a 'sense of control in an overwhelming and complex world'. He believes that secondary markets, namely eBay and Amazon, have made collecting more accessible and that children with social problems at school are most likely to develop these brand obsessions leading to a 'sense of mastery, completion and control' (Ibid). More than 11.6% of UK pupils receive some level of support for SEND (Department for Education, 2016), however many more children do not have an official statement of needs or care plan (Tickle, 2017). That equates to, at the very least, 1,228,785 children, including those on the autistic spectrum, who might have strong inclinations towards brand obsessions (discussed further in Chapter 2.5). These brand obsessions can be played out digitally via ecommerce and branding platforms, potentially with minimal moderation from adults. Protecting young minds, particularly those that are more vulnerable and less able to moderate their own behaviour, is an important area of consideration; are brands doing enough to protect children, particularly those with (un)diagnosed disabilities?

2.2.3.1 CASELET – ZOELLA

Zoe Sugg is an English vlogger and social media personality and has been sharing short videos (vlogs) to her YouTube channels 'Zoella' and 'Zoe Sugg' since 2009. She ostensibly reached the peak of her fame when London visitor attraction Madame Tussauds (2015) unveiled waxwork figures of her and her partner, fellow YouTuber Alfie Deyes.

Zoella initially vlogged from her bedroom. These vlogs were engaging and wholesome often covering her clothes and beauty 'hauls'; this term is described by Meltzer (2014) as the 'girlie answer to the tech world's unboxing videos, a wildly popular YouTube niche where vloggers show off items they recently purchased'. Although Sugg claims the audience for the Zoella YouTube channel is aged between 13-17 years old (Meltzer, 2014), this doctoral study demonstrates that it has been enjoyed by much younger girls.

Zhang (2018, p.15) suggests that improved levels of filming quality, eye contact, facial expressions and conversational mode have been influential in pushing Zoella's average reach per video beyond one million views and making her one of the most successful social media personalities. Her success could be attributed to her looking like the 'popular girl in high school' but Meltzer (2014) claims it is her accessibility that is key, 'pretty and sweet' but 'approachable'.

The key to successful influence is 'above-average reach or impact through word-of-mouth or social marketing' (WARC, 2021a) and Sugg falls firmly into the realm of celebrity influencer with 10.9 million subscribers to her original Zoella channel and 4.92 million subscribers to her

secondary Zoe Sugg channel which she now uses to cover more serious issues and her changing lifestyle as a new mother.

From a solo bedroom-based hobby to an annual revenue of £3.8million, Zoe Sugg and her team now run brand Zoella from an office in Brighton (Zoella, 2021). Her original channel is accessible to tweens and teens, but her newer content on YouTube and now Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest appears to be targeting the fans who have grown up with her as she draws on her own mental health struggles, new motherhood, and more controversially, considering her appeal to younger audiences, sex.

Zoella's longevity as an influencer is testament to her ability to evolve with content formats and platforms, and segmenting content by channel to extend her appeal to different ages. Her success has not come without criticism or indeed warnings from the advertising watchdog on the content or labelling of paid endorsements (Bradley, 2018). However, Deller and Murphy (2020, p.127) found that self-made social media stars who 'circumvent traditional routes to fame' are criticised by journalists and presenters for their 'lack of talent or knowledge' and despite their large followings on social media, are labelled as 'stars you have never heard of'. Indeed, Zoella's younger brother Joe Sugg, a successful YouTuber in his own right, was the shock break-out star of BBC celebrity dancing reality show *Strictly Come Dancing* eventually reaching the final, despite being continually presented on the show as a 'less-than' celebrity.

2.2.4 PROTECTING THE YOUNG CONSUMER

In the Victorian era, as commercialisation of children's books and toys grew rapidly, many toys and games were dangerous, with little care taken over safety precautions. Frost suggests that Victorians were 'less protective' of children than today considering the 'risk of accident' as a part of childhood (2009, p.96).

Ethical practice in America was dubious in the 1960s according to McNeal (1969, p.22) with manufacturers promoting products directly to children via children's television programmes, comics, cereal packets and by giving branded gifts to teachers to give to children. He stressed that 'marketers must be careful when courting the child consumer so as not to offend the parent' with 'visions of exploitation of the innocent and unknowing'. This was not about treating children as worthy of protection but about keeping the parent sweet!

Palfrey and Gasser (2016, pp.38-45) warn that every child has a 'digital dossier' of personal information which quickly builds from birth with their parents' eager birth announcements on social media. Some of this data is publicly accessible and is part of the child's 'digital identity'; some data has controlled access. They caution that children are not asked to make 'informed decisions' about this data and indeed, are in 'no position' to make them. Even their parents are restricted as to how much actual control they have over the growing sea of data collected on their child. This puts children at risk, whether that is from data breaches, violations of privacy, or exposure to inappropriate marketing or personal communications.

In 2018, WhatsApp moved their age limit from 13 to 16 for European users following the introduction of GDPR legislation (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2018), but Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Skype, Instagram and Musical.ly (now TikTok) expect users to be at least 13 years old. Children of any age can watch videos on YouTube, but account holders must also be 13. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in the USA forbids the collection of personal

information for children under 13 without parental permission, hence this common age restriction (Ibid). The reality, of course, is that children can and do sign up for all these sites by lying about their age or using a parent's account. The Facebook owned, WhatsApp, could ask for proof of age but additional stage-gates put off prospective users from signing up. Morrison (2018) writing for The Independent argued that only active enforcement of the GDPR legislation with fines of up to 4% of annual global turnover will ensure technology firms take data protection for children seriously.

It is not just commercial messages that children should be protected from. Children are shopping online at an earlier age by adding items to online baskets or spending gift vouchers. In Thaichon's study of children aged 8-15 (2017, p.45), many felt e-retailers could be 'deceiving' in terms of product descriptions, collecting personal data, sending or returning goods, and taking payment; at the same time, some older children were frustrated at their parents' control over their online shopping through their role as financial gatekeeper.

In 2011, Dr Barbie Clarke was commissioned by Credos (the UK advertising industry's independent think tank) to carry out research with parents and children aged 6 to 16 to understand the impact of advertising and marketing on children following the December 2010 Bailey Review addressing the 'excessive commercialisation' and 'premature sexualisation' of childhood'. These findings indicated that parents believed it was their 'duty as parents to explain the commercial world to their children' and that it was 'the norm'. They were mostly happy with current legislation and expected the regulators to make sure their children's 'naivety' was not exploited. Interestingly, the research indicated that parents are 'pragmatic about advertising' and believe that it helps children and teenagers 'learn about the commercial world'. Dads of children aged 7 to 11 in the BC1 segment were most likely to be unhappy using the term 'aggressive marketing to kids' particularly around Christmas. Parents were most concerned about exposure to adult content rather than children being targeted with adverts via their own programming. An interesting example of this is the success of Netflix at creating viral word of mouth interest in their programming that spreads to tweens and teenagers. Programmes like Sandra Bullock's Bird Box (Christmas 2018) and the Madeline McCann documentary (March 2019) are being accessed and talked about by younger children who are able to bypass child profiles with ease after seeing reviews, comments or the Bird Box challenge on social media.

The advertising industry in the UK is self-regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority with a code of practice covering broadcast and non-broadcast media. These codes explicitly outline how children under 16 should be protected. The CAP Code (The Committee of Advertising Practice, 2014) warns against non-broadcast communications which 'encourage children to make a nuisance of themselves to parents or others' or 'persuade their parents or other adults to buy an advertised product for them'. Communications should not result in their physical, mental, or moral harm, 'exploit their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience', or exploit their 'susceptibility to charitable appeals'.

The Broadcast Code (The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice, 2010) considers that the context of an ad, when it is broadcast, and the age of the audience should be considered. Adverts that could distress younger children should be sensitively scheduled. They should not cause them 'physical, mental or moral harm', 'take advantage of children's inexperience,

credulity or sense of loyalty' or ask them to buy or persuade others to purchase a product or service for them.

We could question why children, if they are active consumers with authentic voices, need to be protected if they are able to articulate their own opinions, act with agency to influence family decision-making, and pester their parents to authorise purchases? Essentially, we are not protecting children from themselves but from others who may have more malign intent.

2.2.5 THE YOUNG DIGITAL CONSUMER

The consumer socialisation of children, where the young acquire the 'skills, knowledge and attitudes' to function as consumers (Ward, 1974, p.2) first began in the Victorian era as the commercial value of women and their spending power was acknowledged. Attitudes towards child labour meant the time to be 'childlike' (Frost, 2009, p.75) was highly prized, and from simple beginnings, the children's sector incorporating books, magazines, toys, and clothes began to grow. Victorian societal values swayed between the idea of the 'wondrous child' (Cross, 2004, pp185-186) and seeing children's economic value as a national asset contributing to mass industrialisation. By the twentieth century, the commercial value of children was fully recognised with toys and games specified by age group (Cook, 2011, p.336) and marketers focusing on this consumer segment with the 'desire and capability to buy' (McNeal, 1969, pp.15-16).

Consumer learning, with parents supporting their children through an 'apprenticeship period of consuming' was seen as a stage gate process by McNeal (1969, p.19) as children passed tests of their ability to undertake errands with increasing independence from their parents. Modern styles of parenting, busy lives and fears of the outside world suggest that children today could be missing out on parental guidance for some stages of consumer learning, particularly as parents may not consider that children are consuming online when they do not have direct access to online payment mechanisms and children are reverse socialising their parents on use of online technology (Chitakunye, 2012; Ward, 2016; Thaichon, 2017). This research study will explore whether this is indeed true. Another potential area of exploration for the primary research, as identified by Moschis (1985), Kerrane, Bettany and Kerrane (2015, pp.729-731), and Kerrane and Hogg (2013, p.518), is the complex networks of modern family dynamics and how this might impact upon children's consumer learning when they are exposed to multiple parental and sibling influences (from biological, step to half and exes).

This section of the literature review has also examined the changes in conceptual frameworks of consumer socialisation, particularly in relation to significant influences on children, suggesting that the internet is now the dominant media influencer for children as well as 'virtual friends' (Thaichon, 2017). This study will set out to explore whether this is indeed true, and to what degree 'virtual friends' are influencing children's consumerisation; it will also confirm the definition of a 'virtual friend' for children today.

Parents struggle with the balance between being a permissive and responsible parent (Buckingham, 2011) but overall, are not averse to children's consumerisation (Clarke, 2011). There are codes of conduct for advertisers, but these may potentially be bypassed by the children themselves who seek out undifferentiated content. Is this happening? Are brands doing enough to protect children who are independently seeking out their own entertainment

content with associated commercial activity? This seems particularly pertinent as we have moved way beyond Postman's predictions in 1994 seeing a huge increase in undifferentiated or easily accessed video content.

With exposure to online communications increasing from a younger age, the study will also confirm whether children in the UK are recognising digital commercial messages at a young age as extensively as is suggested by Valkenburg and Buijzen's study using mass media (2005), and if they do understand these intended advertising effects (Rozendaal, Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2011). Essentially, are children commercially digitally literate even at a young age? This connects to children's cognitive development (Chapter 2.1.7) as well as Lindstrom's theories (2008) about brand obsessions online, so equally are children at risk, when searching out information about brands that excite them?

Chitakunye (2012) stressed the importance of researching children's consumption practices using their own perspective (their authentic voices from active participants), so to discover whether children are learning about brands independently, or undertaking their own consumer training process online, or if they are at risk through their exposure to commercial content, some of which may be undifferentiated, it is critical to research children's views (ethically) without parental input.

2.3 CHILDREN AND DIGITAL DEVICES

The literature reviewed in this chapter so far has considered how children's agency has become realised (Chapter 2.1.5) and demonstrated that children are becoming more independent at an earlier age with accelerated maturation and developmental changes in a cognitive, physical, and physiological sense compared to previous generations (Chapter 2.1.6). The consumerisation of the child (Chapter 2.2) suggests children are aware of product categories and are exposed to commercial influences when browsing the internet, playing games, or being entertained by video content. This section will establish children's propensity to use digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, game consoles, laptops, and computers. It will aim to identify their frequency of usage, and if that usage is supervised or monitored i.e., human (via Mum or Dad) or automated (firewalls, settings, paid services or entertainment platform profiles); if they are using devices safely; and where they are using them. It will go some way towards understanding the level of independence children have in using digital devices and engaging with brands online, and if there are any demographic differences in behaviour. It will also seek to understand current trends in children's media usage and how that behaviour might develop in the near future, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic which is ongoing at the time of writing.

As set out in Chapter 1.5, the scope of this study is the UK, and children's media usage is monitored by Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, responsible for TV, radio and video on demand, fixed line telecoms, mobiles, postal services and wireless airwaves, according to the UK Communications Act (2003). To protect consumers and citizens in its markets, Ofcom carries out regular tracking research into media literacy amongst children and parents. Their 'Children's and Parent's Media Use and Attitudes report' is a large-scale annual quantitative tracking study of children aged 3 to 15 and their parents to examine media access and use, understanding and attitudes, and this has been used as a primary source in this chapter. The last 'stable' data set was published in February 2020 (Ofcom, 2019) prior to the March 2020

lockdown in the UK due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Fieldwork for the next tracking study was delayed and took place in Autumn/Winter 2020/21 at the same time as the second and third national lockdowns in the UK with data published in April 2021 (Ofcom, 2021a). This resulted in a 'substantial shift' in methodology to online methods and consequently, the data cannot be compared to previous or subsequent tracking. These results will be used alongside the previous 'stable' results to try to consider a future forecast for children's media usage, considering children's media usage altered substantially during the Covid-19 pandemic with UK children spending extended periods of lockdown learning from home.

Many entertainment brands and platforms conduct regular research and tracking studies into understanding how children are using digital devices and how much time they are spending with them. These results are not disputed, and some have been referred to in this chapter, but as they are often used to promote a channel or entertainment brand for advertising purposes, they are commercially biased and are used with caution.

2.3.1 DIGITAL DEVICE PENETRATION

Young children are most likely to access the internet via tablets and smartphones. Ofcom's tracker research showed in 2019 that 60% of pre-schoolers aged 3-4 go online using any device, with 49% using tablets, 20% mobile phones, 9% smart TVs, and 4% desktop computers. There is a statistically significant increase in tablet usage amongst these younger children between 2015 and 2019. Children aged 5 to 15 (Ofcom, 2019) are more likely to go online via a tablet, mobile, games console or Smart TV than in 2015. Of this target, 90% will use any device to go online, with 68% using tablets, 55% laptops, 55% mobile phones, 27% games consoles, 18% smart TVs, and 18% desktop computers.

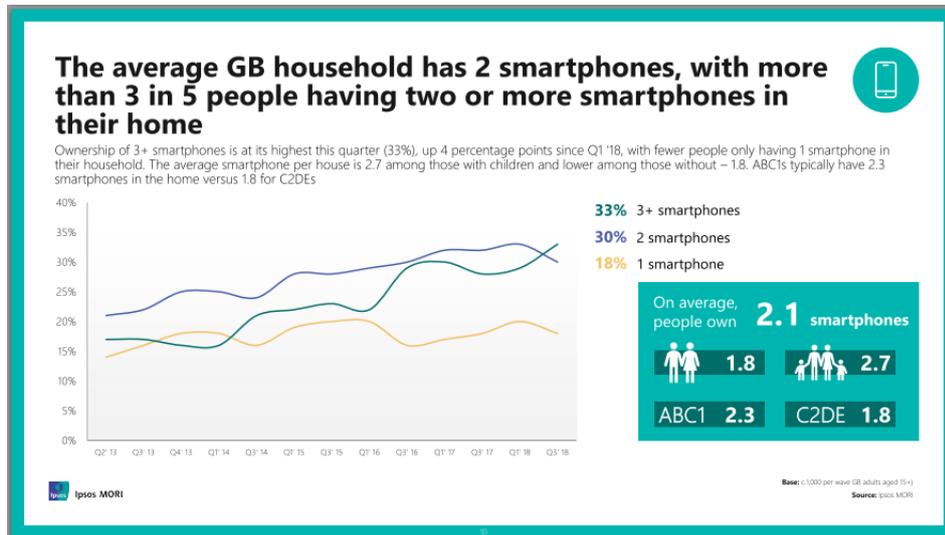
The picture changes in 2020 with the need to access online home learning. The principal device for accessing the internet was the tablet in 2019, but while this remained stable in 2020, the use of laptops, mobile phones, desktops, smart TVs and gaming devices all increased for every age group (Ofcom, 2021a). The re-emergence of the desktop computer suggests all internet-enabled devices were put to the pump in an emergency to ensure all members of the household could get online for work, learning, entertainment or play.

Ownership of smartphones has increased over the past 5 years, with 45% of 5-15s owning a smartphone in 2019 compared to 35% in 2015 (Ofcom, 2019); although the waves cannot be directly compared, this appears to have increased substantially in 2020 to 55%. The pandemic clearly had a massive impact on children's need to be connected to their friends and their schoolwork e.g., online maths apps or virtual learning environments. Perhaps parents passed on old handsets to alleviate children's social isolation from their friends, enabling them to keep in touch via wi-fi enabled messaging and social media platforms? Smartphone ownership varies by age with 5% of 5-7s having their own smartphone, sharply rising to 37% of 8-11s (Ofcom, 2019); both age groups saw artificially high annual increases in smartphone ownership in 2020 (Ofcom, 2021a).

Although it might seem unusual that children have smartphones with an entry level new handset costing £99 and above, Ofcom's device ownership data for children is backed up by Ipsos MORI's technology tracker for Q3 2018 (Ipsos MORI, 2018) with a 1,000 nationally representative UK sample of adults 15+, showing that people have on average 2 smartphones

per household but 2.7 smartphones in households with children (Figure 2: Smartphone Ownership in GB Households). It is highly likely that smartphones are being handed down to younger members of the family at the time of an upgrade. Indeed, children are not necessarily owning a smartphone with an active contract, and it may only be wi-fi enabled for playing games, messaging, and watching video content.

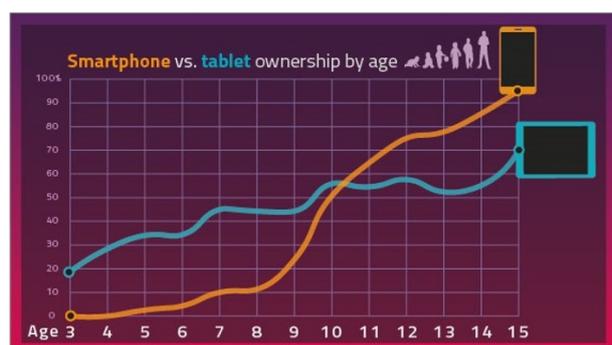
Figure 2: Smartphone Ownership in GB Households



Source: Ipsos MORI (2018)

Ofcom’s research (2019) shows that between the ages of 9 and 10, ownership of smartphones doubles from 23% to 50%, which is likely to be down to children in the UK preparing to start secondary school when they are 11 (Figure 3: Smartphone Vs Tablet Ownership by Age). At this point, which is a pivotal stage of child development in the UK in terms of giving children more freedom, it is likely that children would have an active contract or pay as you go mechanism to enable them to make calls in an emergency.

Figure 3: Smartphone Vs Tablet Ownership by Age



Source: Ofcom (2019)

Although smartphones rule by the age of 9, tablet ownership also increases by age with 24% of 3-4s, 37% of 5-7s, and 48% of 8-11s owning their own tablet. Interestingly, 15% of 3-4s, 14% of 5-7s, and 32% of 8-11s who own their own tablet and 45% of 8-11s who own a mobile phone can take the devices to bed with them (Table 4: Proportion of Children Using Devices at Bedtime). This is a significant point; having devices in a bedroom at bedtime is a

demonstration of parental trust and lenience because the child could be using it through the night instead of sleeping.

Table 4: Proportion of Children Using Devices at Bedtime

	% own tablet	% of owners taking to bed	% own smartphone	% of owners taking to bed
Age 3-4	24%	15%	-	-
Age 5-7	37%	14%	5%	-
Age 8-11	49%	32%	37%	45%

Source: Ofcom (2019)

If we extrapolate these results from Ofcom’s research to the UK population using population data from the ONS (Table 5: Estimate of Children's Independent Use of Devices at Bedtime), we can estimate that there are 703,400 children aged 3-11 using their own tablets at bedtime, which is 9.5% of all UK children in this age band. Ownership of smartphone is negligible for very young children, but there are estimated to be 548,707 children aged 8-11 using their smartphones at bedtime, which is 7.4% of all UK children in that age band. It is highly likely that if a child is taking their device to bed, with the opportunity to use that device during the rest period, subject to any parental controls or rules, then that usage would be independent and unsupervised. Parents are also highly likely to have more rules about bedtime usage of digital devices than daytime usage, and this figure may be underreported in the research as night-time usage can be criticised as ‘slummy parenting’ (see Chapter 2.3.6) by other parents and society, so this estimate is hypothesised to be the lowest estimated figure of independent usage. The Ofcom study (2019) did not provide an indication of daytime data, nor where children are using devices, and if they are using them on their own or supervised by a parent or older sibling in the room. The same data is not available in the 2021 study, but it is highly likely that children would be spending more time using their devices in their bedrooms alone than prior to the pandemic, due to parents working from home, and families wanting some space from each other in a hot house environment.

Table 5: Estimate of Children's Independent Use of Devices at Bedtime

	No. of Children in the UK	% own tablet	No. own tablet	% of owners taking to bed	No. independent tablet users
Age 3-4	1,604,519	24%	385,085	15%	57,763
Age 5-7	2,488,360	37%	920,693	14%	128,897
Age 8-11	3,295,535	49%	1,614,812	32%	516,740
Total 3-11	7,388,414		2,920,590		703,400

	No. of Children in the UK	% own smartphone	No. own smartphone	% of owners taking to bed	No. independent smartphone users
Age 3-4	1,604,519	-	-	-	-
Age 5-7	2,488,360	5%	124,418	-	-
Age 8-11	3,295,535	37%	1,219,348	45%	548,707
Total 3-11	7,388,414		1,343,766		548,707

Source: Ofcom (2019); ONS (2020)

A small exploratory study of Australian preschool children aged 3-4 by Given, Winkler, Wilson, et al., (2014) did observe that these young children were using laptops, iPads, smartphones and Wii consoles in common living areas with few using bedrooms and outdoor patios, but for 45% of the time, these children were engaging with technology on their own in the space. Even when a parent or sibling was in the room, they did not always engage with the child, and were busy with other activities.

Based on Ofcom’s bedtime data from its robust, quantitative study, the most conservative estimate of independent digital device usage by children in the UK is 703,400 tablet users aged 3 to 11 and 548,707 smartphone users aged 8-11. The Australian study was small scale, qualitative research and as such, is only indicative, but if 45% of children using digital devices independently and unsupervised is more reflective of the true picture of daytime usage, then the number of children using digital devices in an unsupervised way would be much greater. This proportion (45%) matches the percentage of smartphone users aged 8-11 using their phone independently as in the Ofcom (2019) study with an estimate of 548,707 smartphone users aged 8-11. Using the same proportions of tablet ownership and estimates of the general population, this would equate to 1,579,577 children aged 3-11 using their tablets independently and unsupervised, which is 21.4% of all UK children in that age band (Table 6: Estimate of Children’s Independent Use of Smartphones - Daytime).

Table 6: Estimate of Children’s Independent Use of Smartphones - Daytime

	No. of Children in the UK	% own tablet	No. own tablet	% of owners estimated to be using independently	No. independent tablet users
Age 3-4	1,604,519	24%	385,085	45%	173,288
Age 5-7	2,488,360	37%	920,693	44%	405,105
Age 8-11	3,295,535	49%	1,614,812	62%	1,001,184
Total 3-11	7,388,414		2,920,590		1,579,577

Source: Ofcom (2019); ONS (2020); Given, Winkler, Wilson, et al., (2014)

This estimated data is only an extrapolation based on a small, observational study in Australia and there is a gap in understanding how UK primary schoolchildren aged 4 to 11 use these devices independently during the daytime, but this analysis demonstrates the significance of this study in considering the behaviour and interactions of these young children with brands in the digital environment, and how those commercial interactions take place, and the potential threats or impacts upon the child. It is proposed that the pandemic has raised the significance of this study in terms of understanding the behaviour and interactions of young children with brands on digital devices in an unsupervised environment.

Although smartphones and tablets are by far the most popular device for young children, smart speakers are starting to become more popular and are used as a substitute for a radio. Smart speakers are wireless, voice activated devices that enable the user to use integrated virtual assistants like Alexa and Siri to obtain information or perform tasks. These were used by 15% of children aged 5 to 15 in 2018 rising to 27% in 2019 (Ofcom, 2019) and are used in a fun way to answer questions and play music. This is a conservative estimate according to a survey by independent UK research agency, Childwise, who found 40% of children aged 9 to 16 were

using voice recognition assistants and devices at home (WARC, 2018). It is likely these helpful and sometimes funny assistants, which can be viewed as part of the family (or furniture), are not thought of in the same way as a mobile phone or tablet, despite some concerns in society that they are listening in. Their use may not be moderated or timed and without checking the settings, they can be used to directly purchase and deliver goods e.g., Amazon's Alexa will add products to your shopping basket and check them out.

2.3.2 ENGAGING WITH CONTENT

It is perhaps not surprising that video-on-demand (VoD) content has increased in popularity during the lockdown; almost all children watched any type of on-demand entertainment (including Netflix, recorded content on TV, YouTube, BBC iPlayer, DVDs, and renting/buying online content) compared to just over half watching live TV (Ofcom, 2021a). The implication is just under half of this generation are no longer engaging with traditional commercial breaks between programming and are commercially influenced through other types of advertising that may not be as obviously or as ethically signposted.

It appears that children are turning to tablets (58% of 5-15s) and smartphones (50% of 5-15s) to watch TV programmes (Ofcom, 2021a) with a third watching on a laptop, desktop, games console or player. With children not watching TV programming on a TV set, it could be surmised that children are choosing their own content, to watch on their own, on their own device, thus showing both an independence in their content choices and the sole nature of their device usage, as family or sibling viewing is more likely to be done on a bigger screen.

In Children's Media Lives (Ofcom, 2021b), a qualitative longitudinal study with 18 children aged between 8 and 18, the children's daily screen time diaries proved they were spending long periods of time online, often multi-screening, using TikTok to watch videos, gaming, or binge-watching shows through YouTube or streaming platforms like Netflix; one 17-year-old boy had a screen time average of 15 hours per day! Parents in Ofcom's tracking study also concurred that they found it challenging to control the screen time of children aged 5-15 during the lockdown as there was little else to do (Ofcom, 2021a). Konca (2021, p.1) who drew on the Ofcom study (2019) found that parents were actively trying to control the screen time of children aged 3-6 but this still topped more than 3 hours daily. The high levels of screen time for children in 2020/21 were a result of an extraordinary period of confinement to the home in the UK, and it is hoped that this will not be repeated. However, it is clear that parents find managing screen time difficult, and once children have had a taste of freedom, it is hard to reclaim it. With streaming and video sharing platforms producing such an engaging, entertaining and addictive array of content, it is hardly surprising that children want to keep watching for long periods of time.

2.3.2.1 TYPE OF CONTENT

YouTube is used by 75% of 5-15s and was the number one platform of choice for children in Ofcom's research (2019) selected by 45%, more than Netflix (32%) or BBC/ITV television channels (17%). There appears to be differences in usage by age, cartoons for younger children aged 3-7, compared to funny videos and music for older children. Many children felt it was useful to learn how to build, create or make things (up from 42% to 60%). More than a

third of 8-11s liked to watch vloggers or YouTube influencers from YouTube stars to more local, nano influencers.

Although there is a YouTube Kids app, this is not universally used, 48% of 3-4s usage of YouTube and 25% of 5-7s was via the kids version but 39% of 3-4s usage and 57% of 5-7s was via the normal website/app (Ofcom, 2017). This means children are potentially exposed to adult content and could see inappropriate recommended content on the banners and search bars. Equally, children may be exposed to editorial content within videos on the mainstream YouTube channel and on streaming platforms like Netflix that contain product placement. De Pauw, Hudders and Cauberghe (2018, p.508) put forward that despite product placement for children being banned in the EU, children may still see placement via other programming, and may struggle to distinguish 'commercial content from the editorial media content in which it is embedded, therefore advertising disclosures should be made to help them to cope with product placement.

It is not surprising that children are inadvertently watching content that is not targeted at them. In fact, in qualitative research conducted for Ofcom by Waldie, et al., (2017), children did not always have set ideas on what to watch on YouTube. Ahmed (age 11) enjoyed finding new content on YouTube and would click on the 'Random Category' tab to find content recommendations whilst Ben (age 8) would go to 'Top Picks'. Emma (age 8) would stumble upon content by misspelling words in the search function of Netflix e.g., watched 'Free Rein' after misspelling 'Reign'. Ben had watched content with swearing when not using kids settings on YouTube or Netflix but turned this off himself. Ahmed said he would turn off anything that was age inappropriate with sex scenes and 'try not to think about it'. There are two interesting issues here, firstly, with the power relationship between the adult researcher and child, was Ahmed telling the truth or did he really watch the saucy content? Secondly, children are haphazardly searching for engaging content in a way that would easily expose them to content that was not designed for their age group.

Children are not just watching videos; they are confidently creating their own. More than half of 5-15s posted or shared content on video sharing platforms including TikTok, YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat (Ofcom, 2021a). These platforms also offer the opportunity to broadcast live with a 'livestream' to their subscribers or followers, with 8% of 8-11s creating their own (Ofcom, 2021a). It appears that lockdowns and time spent at home has exacerbated children's desire for online entertainment, and for creating their own content. There is no indication from this data as to whether children are broadcasting live privately to their friends or if they are exposing themselves more widely.

2.3.3 GAMING

Gaming has been rising in popularity, but again, the desire for home entertainment during the pandemic has seen engagement soar with 71% of 5-15s playing games online (Ofcom, 2021a). Gaming is becoming more popular for girls, but it is still dominated by boys across all age groups (Ofcom, 2019; Ofcom, 2021a). Children are most likely to be using a variety of devices for gaming, with both personal and public screens, however even with a public screen, this does not necessarily mean the child is supervised or in the same room as a parent. In Ofcom's most recent study (2021a), boys are using gaming devices as a way of talking online with other players with 25% playing with someone they did not know or had ever met. This is

a worrying proportion of children who could be exposed to risk, although some gaming discussion boards, or chats might be moderated.

2.3.3.1 CASELET – MINECRAFT

Minecraft is a popular 3D ‘sandbox’ computer game, a term that refers to the degree of creativity and freedom in the gameplay and its lack of objectives, with players making their own worlds and everything they want within them (Niemeyer and Gerber, 2015, p.217). Players choose between creative or survival mode, with unlimited resources in creative mode and obstacles and creatures to fight in survival mode. Players can participate through a multitude of gaming platforms, online or offline, in groups or independently, and at a difficulty level of their choosing by controlling an avatar that can place or break (delete) blocks in a world constructed of blocks. These blocks are made of different substances that can be selected or mined by the player and are reminiscent of Lego.

The growth in Minecraft could be attributed to its availability across different platforms and consoles, as well as the rise in tablet computing allowing younger children to play the game independently (Mavoa, Carter and Gibbs, 2018, p.3284).

The game does not come with a ‘how to play’ manual (Niemeyer and Gerber, 2015, pp.217-218) therefore gamers are drawn into a ‘digital maker culture’ where they learn and use practical skills, apply these to different situations, and engage with peers and the wider Minecraft community to build new items for their virtual world.

Many children and adults in the gaming community create Minecraft walkthroughs and commentaries on YouTube to help other players develop their skills, acquire items, and solve creative or survival challenges (Niemeyer and Gerber, 2015, p.216; Wernholm and Vigmo, 2015, p.234). Watching Minecraft videos appears to be more popular amongst older children and boys (Mavoa, Carter and Gibbs, 2018, p.3293). Pellicone and Ahn (2018, pp.448-449) studied a 14-year-old Minecraft player and vlogger who wanted to be a ‘famous YouTuber’ by recording his gameplay for his YouTube channel and walking viewers through his activities step by step. Although he measured success in terms of YouTube subscribers, he was more concerned that players enjoyed his server (Pellicone and Ahn, 2018, p.445) which was a hosted Minecraft world that players could visit and join in with collaborative building and maintenance of the digital space. It appears that the altruism of the supportive digital maker culture could be in conflict with the monetisation of popular YouTube channels.

The digital space where children play the game, watch videos, and interact with each other is described by Pellicone and Ahn (2018, pp.442-445) as an ‘affinity space’ where players ‘interact with each other, typically at a distance, relating to a common endeavour’, with children observed to become ‘lost in the act of building socially and collaborating’.

Developer, Mojang AB, is clear that all endorsements and publicity for Minecraft has come from ‘community development, not from marketing’ (Wernholm and Vigmo, 2015, p.233). Children are driving the popularity for this game amongst themselves through word of mouth and inspiring new levels of creativity through their YouTube walkthrough videos. It is no wonder that it has been described as ‘children’s new playground’ (Werholm and Vigmo, 2015, p.231).

2.3.4 SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Many young children appear to be on social media with their own profile, despite the guidance restrictions set by the platforms (age 16 for WhatsApp and 13 for most other platforms). Although the data waves are not comparable, there appears to be a distinct rise in the number of 'underage' children with social media profiles from 25% of 5-11s (Ofcom, 2019) to 42% (Ofcom, 2021a). Most parents, when asked, knew there was a minimum age requirement to have a profile on popular social media platforms, but few could name it correctly. There appears to be a great deal of latitude around this issue with parents supporting underage children to have their own profiles. These findings suggest that as most parents know there is an age restriction but do not check this before allowing their children to have social media, they either do not care or do not think the risks outweigh the benefits to their child.

This can be explained by a qualitative study commissioned by Ofcom (Waldie, et al., 2017) profiling a young girl called Emma (age 8) who was using Snapchat so her Mum could message her while she was with her horse at the stables. She had a small group of friends on her network and strict privacy settings created by her Mum to stop her sending photos. This pattern of usage is not unusual; De Almeida, et al., (2014, p.1448) and Weeden, Cooke and McVey (2013) found that most children are restricting access to their virtual social network to their 'real-life' friends and family, and many restrict their profile to their personal network keeping it private.

At age 8, Emma was significantly below the age that children are permitted to join social networks but there is nothing to stop children (or their parents) falsifying their date of birth. Social networks are bound by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in the USA and the GDPR in the EU not to collect personal data from children under the age of 13 without parental permission. Weeden, Cooke and McVey (2013) surveyed children aged 7-12 in the USA to explore the ease of misrepresenting ages to gain access to product promotions via social media platforms. In their study, 18% of 9-year-olds were using social media and by the age of 12, 89% were subscribed. The study did not examine the role of parents in assisting children to join these services, or the degree of parental monitoring once the service has been accessed. This study took place in 2013, and considered social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Of course, social media channels go out of fashion and business, and the rich media format channels of today such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok are even more popular with young children.

2.3.5 COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

The children in Ofcom's 2019 study were generally aware that vloggers make money through their content but were not sure how this worked. Although over 75% of 8-15s who had seen adverts on television and online thought they were mostly or sometimes telling the truth, children in AB households are better able to make critical judgements about advertising than children in DE households. There was no difference between sociodemographic groups for television advertising, so it appears that there are differences in critical judgement of digital advertising for some groups of children. Only 18% of 8-11s could identify ads in Google search results, and this is still quite low for the older age group of 12-15s (34%), so it appears that children are limited in knowing how to 'assess trust in a site' (Ofcom, 2019).

Around 61% of 8-11s only visit online websites or apps they have used before, 27% will visit one or two new sites or apps, and 5% are more exploratory using lots of sites and apps they haven't used before (Ofcom, 2019). Boys are more likely to visit lots of new sites or apps compared to girls (12% versus 7%). Although children in AB households are more likely to make critical judgements about advertising than DE households, they are also more exposed as they are more likely to visit one or two unknown sites than children in lower income households (40% versus 27%).

When it comes to Google search listings, 26% of 8-11s think all the websites listed by the engine can be trusted (Ofcom, 2017), 52% thought some could and some couldn't, and 11% did not really consider the issue at all. This suggests that the well-known Google brand name is a symbol of trust, and many children are relying on the brand to have pre-vetted the websites in the same way that the BBC curates its content, which is obviously not true but is significant because of the relationship between children and the brand.

Looking at 8-11s, 33% report sometimes seeing adverts on TV and 58% that they often see adverts (Ofcom, 2017). Only 7% said they never see them. 47% of 8-11s say they sometimes see online ads, 34% often see them, and 14% never see ads. Television adverts are therefore more visible than online ads to children in this age category (91% versus 81%). In fact, commercial research by children's channel Nickelodeon (2015), which draws on the Ofcom data and online interviews and facial coding by Ofcom's children's research partner Childwise, claims that children 'are more engaged with messages which are placed within a relevant environment' and that despite multi-screening, 'advertising is still deeply engaging with high recall across a variety of platforms'.

Children seem to be able to spot adverts that interrupt their gaming or viewing, particularly on YouTube (Waldie, et al., 2017). Ahmed (age 11) tended to skip them but had previously purchased games he had seen advertised. He could not be sure how to tell if an ad was trustworthy but assumed TV ads would be, as they are more expensive. These findings appear to suggest that children are being exposed to advertising repeatedly via multiple devices and are making some form of connection with the content. If children are spending extended periods of time on their devices, they could be exposed to frequent, repeated messages, which if Ahmet's strategy was followed by other children, would make them more likely to trust the brand because of the amount of money spent on showing them the ad repeatedly.

2.3.6 PARENTAL CONCERNS

Children generally feel well-informed about internet safety with 96% of children who go online recalling guidance from parents, teachers, the police, or friends (Ofcom, 2019). Despite this, 18% of 8-11s had seen 'something worrying or nasty online' but luckily, almost all, would tell someone about it such as a parent or teacher. Girls are more likely to tell someone than boys (94% versus 88%), which suggests that boys, who are more likely than girls to game online, might need more support. An interesting downward trend is that the proportion of parents who feel that the 'benefits of the internet outweigh the risks for their child' is declining from 65% in 2015 to 55% in 2019; it appears that parents are considering if their child should be online at all. This would have implications for brands wanting to build relationships with children and stresses the importance of managing these fledgling relationships carefully and ethically.

Although parents seem to be seeking advice on how to keep their child safe online (87% of parents of 5-15s), they do not seem to be taking advantage of safety mechanisms to that much of a degree. Only 41% of parents of 8-11s and 33% of 5-7s use home network content filters, and 35% of 5-7s and 36% of 8-11s use parental control software (Ofcom, 2019). Only 25% use YouTube's restricted mode; less than half of parents whose child uses a tablet or smartphone knows how to use the parental control settings; and only 22% of parents of 5-15s have changed the settings on a phone or tablet to stop inappropriate purchases. It appears that parents demonstrate concern over the use of devices, the internet and social media, but suffer from inertia in terms of taking action to stop their children accessing the internet or using devices independently. This is, however, the digital parenting paradox. Are parents balancing the benefits of the internet to their children or themselves as they reap the benefits of a quiet, occupied child? Certainly, the rise in blogs from 'slummy mummies' who openly celebrate 'bad' parenting through their online diary posts e.g., Hurrah for Gin and The Unmumsy Mum indicate that many parents struggle with the dilemma of how much screen time should be for 'educational purposes' versus 'electronic babysitting' (Plowman, Stephen and McPake, 2010, p.22).

Electronic babysitting can lead to very young children clicking on video content to make their own selections or being exposed to videos with the same keywords automatically playing when the first has finished. This can be dangerous, as mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1, when children are looking for more content from their favourite characters if that content is hijacked e.g., the Momo suicide game on Peppa Pig. This pink cartoon character is a global success; a Chinese language film 'Peppa celebrates Chinese New Year' garnered 1.63 billion social media views against the movie's hashtag (Vlessing, 2019), merchandise sales are worth \$1.2 billion annually, and the franchise has 117 new episodes in production. This makes 'Peppa Pig' an incredibly popular search term which could be hijacked by those who want to cause children harm. Parents should be more concerned than they appear to be.

2.3.6.1 BRAND RESPONSIBILITY

Parents are concerned about the amount of television advertising watched by their child (Ofcom, 2017), with 29% of parents of 3-4s very/fairly concerned, 32% of 5-7s and 32% of 8-11s. There certainly appears to be a pester power connection between viewing TV advertising and asking parents for that product. This is much more prevalent for the youngest children with 16% reporting their 3-4s asked for something every day. Overall, 70% of 3-4s 'ever ask', with 87% of 5-7s and 79% of 8-11s. The figures for online are much lower with 55% of 3-4s ever asking, 62% of 5-7s, and 69% of 8-11s. Despite TV advertising appearing to be more influential on pester power than online, it is online media content that parents said they were most concerned about (internet, 35%; TV, 31%; and games, 29%).

Parents are also concerned about brand interactions with their child in terms of what data is being collected online about them (46% of parents of 5-15s); 35% are concerned about the pressure on their child to spend money online; and 27% of parents of 5-15s are concerned about the amount of advertising in games particularly in relation to in-app/in-game purchases (Ofcom, 2017).

Parental mediation is not the only way to keep children safe. Brands and publishers also have a responsibility to know where their online adverts are appearing, particularly if children are

exploring digital content freely and independently. This is challenging when media planners are using programmatic software to optimise online ad spend or retargeting ads to site visitors via other sites. Digital ads can appear in the wrong context and brand infractions such as copyright infringements are frequent e.g., when content is stolen and replicated for search engine optimisation (SEO) purposes. Digital fraud can make engagement with online brands an unsafe activity, particularly when 2% of native ads (often found in social media feeds, lists of articles or as recommended content) are deemed to be a security threat (Carruthers, 2018).

The responsibilities of brands are explored further in Chapter 2.2.4, but the European Commission (2021) favours self-regulation by the industry to ensure that children can continue to benefit from the internet's opportunities when they use it safely and responsibly. The 'CEO Coalition' is a voluntary group of 21 major companies aiming to take positive action to make the internet safer for children through age-appropriate privacy settings, content classification, parental controls and removing child sexual abuse material. Their voluntary guidelines have been informed by 18 of Europe's main social networks, researchers, child welfare organisations, NGOs, and European and International organisations. Netflix has also been quite active in developing new tracking features for children under 12, with a new Netflix Kids Activity Report to show the type of content they watch most, the favourite characters and recommendations for new shows based on an analysis of their viewing history (Dixon, 2020). It has been designed to get children and their parents talking about the content they view. It is hard to see that this is a safety feature as it does not trigger safety alerts and it places responsibility for viewing and content directly with the parents, therefore absolving Netflix of the liability. It could be argued that this is just playing lip service to the ethical challenge of protecting children on its platform. It is clear from the CEO Coalition that many companies do acknowledge the need to do more and youth digital media ecosystem providers, Super Awesome (2019) report that the rollout of data protection act GDPR in Europe which has a component relating to children, has 'accelerated the understanding of compliance globally beyond major brands'.

The UK, who has now exited from the European Union, has also favoured self-regulation through the Advertising Standards Authority. It urged marketers to 'prepare campaigns with a sense of social responsibility' (ASA, 2012) and aims to evolve the code or guidance as issues arise e.g., reviewing whether brand ambassador or peer-to-peer marketing activity resulted in physical, mental or moral harm of children (ASA, 2012) and proactively monitoring and tackling instances where age-restricted ads appear on websites and YouTube channels that are aimed at children or attract a disproportionately large audience of children (ASA, 2021b). This new monitoring of website and YouTube channels covers restricted product categories, namely, weight control and slimming; food or drinks high in fat, salt or sugar; gambling; alcohol; e-cigarettes and tobacco. Just in October-December 2020, 21 advertisers were caught breaching the rules, with the food and drinks high in fat, salt or sugar category being the worst offender (ASA, 2021a). This demonstrates that despite the willingness of European Governments to support self-regulation, there are still well-known brands breaking the rules and putting children at risk. Globally, there is a move towards more regulation with the USA discussing an extension to regulations on digital privacy with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) taking in 16-years-olds, beyond the current 13-year-olds, with similar laws anticipated in China and India. Super Awesome (2019) reports that this would increase

the governance of digital privacy to 800 million children in 2021 compared to 130 million in 2019.

2.3.7 PERSONAL GEOGRAPHIES

Society is very concerned with children's lives, particularly the impact of technology upon their health and wellbeing (Blundell, 2016, p.9; Ofcom, 2017). Tracking online behaviour, monitoring social media posts or keeping actual tabs on the child by 'e-stalking' them through their GPS (e.g., Life360) are options for parents wishing to keep an eye on their children's digital activities but Palfrey and Gasser (2016, p.75) suggest 'heavy-handed online surveillance and tracking techniques' can have a negative impact on trust between the parent and child. They believe children retreat to chat services like Snapchat, WhatsApp and functions in multiplayer computer games because they are 'alienated' from public spaces and parents should not be 'chasing' them 'from safe spaces into more remote zones' (Ibid).

If modern childhood is a socially constructed 'symbolic space' for 'biologically immature humans', (Blundell, 2016, p.11), then spatiality offers a way of examining the 'synchronous dimension' of social life, namely the homogeneous and heterogeneous variables of children (age, gender, social class, ethnicity, disability) and how 'power distributes itself across social settings and relations' (Idem, pp.40-41). Understanding the places and spaces in which children live, can explain more about the differences in children's lives and social worlds, than just considering them as a homogenous unit explained by their developmental stage.

Teather (1999 cited in Blundell, 2016, pp.46-47) identified four ways of referring to space in the social world: space as place with children constructing meaning from named places or localities with 'social, cultural or individual meaning'; activity space where lives can be lived; positional or relational spaces such as identity and citizenship; and discursive space as public, cultural and institutional attitudes formed by discourse. Teather refers to 'home' as a fifth place where all four spaces are referenced.

Spatiality is an important concept when it comes to understanding how children use digital devices. Are they in fact creating a sixth space where they can assign 'social, cultural or individual meaning' to places or localities online e.g. online communities or shared worlds in Minecraft and other games; where they own their 'activity spaces' where they can play freely and unfettered by physical ability, geography or parental rules; where they feel they belong; and where they control the narrative which may be relatively free and unregulated (bar some moderation of discussion groups by adults)? Certainly, in today's society, children are bounded by institutions (school) and their 'activity space' is 'islanded' by parents who confine their play to 'pre-constructed' spaces by ferrying children to playdates and activities according to their schedules, mobility and 'parent-dependent' friendships (Blundell, 2016, pp.111-112).

It appears that children are now challenging their 'spatial location in society' (De Almeida, et al., 2014, p.1437) by crossing the 'private, local, material boundaries of the home' when accessing the internet via computers, tablets and smartphones. The authors claim that online and offline worlds are 'not different domains', and children are now 'disturbing established generational categories and the adult-children power balance' through their 'independent, active and competent' use of the internet, (Idem, p.1439).

2.3.8 DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT – ACCESS ALL AREAS

In conclusion, from a young age, children in the UK are universally accessing and using digital devices, particularly tablets and smartphones. There is rising propensity for very young children to be using tablets, and smartphone ownership has grown exponentially during the pandemic (Ofcom, 2021a). By the age of 10, 50% of UK children have a smartphone ready for the transition to the more grown-up senior school (Ofcom, 2019), and this is likely to increase as a result of children being given handsets to keep in touch with their friends during the pandemic (Ofcom, 2021a).

Tablets and mobiles are the most popular devices now for watching TV programmes and films (Ofcom, 2021a) and this use of small screen technology to watch long content suggests this is a solo activity, rather than family time which would be based around a bigger screen. Even when children are watching a big screen, they are often multi-tasking with other devices, engaging with their own content.

Most children are watching video-on-demand content (Ofcom, 2021a) and just over half are watching no live TV at all; this means that children will be seeing fewer traditional commercial breaks and will be exposed to digital advertising which may not be as obvious e.g., Netflix often uses product placement (De Pauw, Hudders and Cauberghe, 2018, p.508) and YouTube ads may not be targeted to their age group (ASA, 2021a) or adhere to relevant legislation.

Playing games online has become increasingly popular in the pandemic for boys and girls, but boys are still more likely to play games and talk online with people they do not know (Ofcom, 2019; Ofcom, 2021a). The increasingly online connected nature of gaming appears to expose children to potential risks.

There is a growing use of home smart speakers with voice activated assistants like Alexa and Siri (WARC, 2018) that may be providing unmoderated access to the internet and potentially unguarded opportunities to purchase e.g., via Amazon, if restrictions are not put in place by the parent (Ofcom, 2019). This may be a growing concern as, during the pandemic, children will have become used to their parents buying everything they need on Amazon and having that delivered to their door.

The Ofcom data does not tell us exactly how supervised or unsupervised children are when using their own digital devices, particularly when in their bedrooms, but Given, Winkler, Wilson, et al., (2014) suggests that many children are accessing digital devices independently, without any or limited supervision. Underage children are using social media platforms via mobiles, with their parent's knowledge and potentially to benefit the parent (keeping in touch when apart). Children are also increasingly broadcasting live on video sharing platforms (Ofcom, 2021a) presumably from their bedrooms which means sharing their private spaces publicly.

All of the above points suggest that children are making independent choices when seeking entertainment: what to watch, what to search for, what to play, what to download and share, what to create, and even what to buy.

It is suggested that children are using the internet as an 'activity space' where they can escape the confines of their physically bounded and 'pre-constructed' lives (Blundell, 2016, pp.111-112); this must have been particularly useful during repeated lockdowns. Parents are using a

range of mediation options, but these are not always in place (Ofcom, 2019). Children are aware of internet safety, and many monitor their own activity by switching off inappropriate content (Waldie, et al., 2017). Some parents are trying to monitor children's usage by a variety of automated or human interventions, but children's thirst for entertaining content means these safety mechanisms are often bypassed e.g., misspelling search terms, clicking for recommended 'hot picks' (Waldie, et al., 2017).

Children have some commercial awareness and can generally understand that influencers make money when they recommend products but are not exactly sure how they do this. It is not clear whether they would class a child in an unboxing video (see Chapter 2.3.8.1), or on a game walkthrough (see Chapter 2.3.3.1) as an influencer, but of course, any digital channel can be monetised. Although the proportion of parents that think the benefits of the internet outweigh the negatives is declining, indicating that parents are more worried about children and digital than before, they do not appear to act significantly to protect children through the use of filters and settings (Ofcom, 2019). It would be interesting to see how parent's views on the benefits of the internet will have changed in Ofcom's next hopefully 'stable' wave of research to see if the advantages of home entertainment and learning have changed their opinion.

The data collected through the pandemic has shown an exponential rise in children's device ownership and time spent online. The data waves are not comparable and there is no post-pandemic data available. Super Awesome (2019) reported a 22% rise in hours spent online for 5-15s between 2014 and 2018, compared to a rise of 18% for adults. They stated that children are the fastest growing online audience (Super Awesome, 2019). The direction of travel pre-pandemic was already fast moving. As active agents and digital natives, children are taking full advantage of their access to the internet. This is coupled with the emergent evolution in dexterity with the reversed pincer grip, which provides them with a greater level of independence over their computer usage at a much earlier age with varying degrees of parental supervision. Children are clearly digitally connected and are seeking entertainment, but it is still unclear how they form these brand preferences online, and to what extent or form they engage with brands online, particularly non-media brands. How do they seek them out and are these preferences sustainable? Ofcom's quantitative research (2017) also covered specific attitudes to media for 12-15 years old and this showed that some brand preferences such as following YouTube vloggers appeared to wane at this stage of their development.

The safety of these potential brand interactions must also be explored. Are children sharing personal information online via branded websites that can expose them to danger? Do they want more protection from brands? Do their fears impact on how they interact with brands or create new brand relationships? This is particularly interesting as it seems that children engage with a relatively small portfolio of websites.

Finally, in terms of independent usage and agency, has the internet become a sixth space, similar to 'home' that encompasses different aspects of spatiality (Blundell, 2016, p.11) to assign 'social, cultural or individual meaning' to their own 'activity space', unbounded and free of rules and regulations, where they control the narrative? These gaps will be explored further in the primary research for this study.

2.3.8.1 CASELET – TOY UNBOXING

The ‘unboxing’ video is a genre of extremely popular social media content, predominantly found on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Indeed, an online search of the term ‘unboxing’ returned more than 57 million results in a study by Mowlabocus (2020, p.564) and it has been referred to by parents as highly addictive ‘toddler crack’ (Kollmeyer, 2015).

Unboxing originated in the tech world where ‘vloggers show off items they recently purchased’ and is similar to the beauty or clothes ‘haul’ reveal (Meltzer, 2014) where predominantly female influencers unwrap and unveil their online purchases to camera. Craig and Cunningham (2017, p.77) describe toy unboxing as ‘rapidly scaling and commercialising videos featuring the opening, assembling and demonstration of children’s toys, often by children, across social media platforms’. Some of the most popular unboxers, have become influencers with large followings, such as EvanTube HD and Ryan Toys Review.

These videos follow a similar narrative with an adult, children, or family group, ‘unboxing’ a new toy to much excitement. The process may involve removing outer wrappings, cutting security seals, assembling toys and playing with them. This is all about a narrative journey of ‘discovery and revelation’ (Mowlabocus, 2020, pp.567-8) with the viewer invited to see the toy for the very first time alongside the reviewer, although of course, the reviewer’s revelation may just be good acting!

Nicoll and Nansen (2018, p.8) analysed the content of 100 toy unboxing videos and found that the age of the featured children ranged from toddler to teenager with most being of primary school age (4 to 11). The type of toys unboxed was heavily gendered with girls unboxing collectible miniatures like Shopkins and boys unboxing and building toy cars and Lego.

Marsh (2016, pp.375-377) suggested that although viewing unboxing videos could be considered negatively as ‘vicarious consumption’, it could be considered more positively as a practice allowing children to ‘participate in a particular affinity space’, where they could ‘enjoy the sights’ (watching another child play with a toy of interest to them) but ‘not necessarily purchasing the goods’.

Content creating ‘amateur child unboxers’ often ‘mimic the production and branding strategies of the professional channels’ (Nicoll and Nansen, 2018, p.1). The authors found this ‘mimesis’ explained the relationship between children’s play and commercialisation in the genre, perhaps in the way that a child of the 70s would pretend play at being a greengrocer selling fruits and vegetables.

The genre therefore allows children to play an active role in the creation of online videos as well as eagerly and perhaps excessively consuming the content (Nicoll and Nansen (2018, pp.1-10). This agentic behaviour is encouraged by some parents who can be seen and heard on videos directing and curating the proceedings in ‘new forms of entrepreneurial labour’ (Craig and Cunningham, 2017, pp.78-84) in order to create and monetise their child’s or family’s influence as a social media brand.

It is not surprising that some parents are keen to jump onto the unboxing bandwagon when the commercial potential is so lucrative with one of the most popular channels ‘Disney

Collector' estimated to be earning between \$2-13 million annually in advertising revenue (Marsh, 2016, p.375).

This kind of content is essentially peer on peer marketing, children marketing toys to other children, and while some videos may be independent of commercial influence and play-based, many are made for monetary gain. Both The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) in the USA have been concerned about YouTube influencers posting videos that 'blur the lines of content and advertising' making it harder for consumers, particularly children, to identify sponsored posts. This native advertising, where the sponsored video follows a similar format and feel to unpaid videos on the channel, can be wrongly perceived as 'independent content reflecting the impartial opinion of the host' (Evans, Grubbs Hoy and Carpenter Childers, 2018, pp.326-7). This may be because it is not labelled correctly as sponsored content or advertising, or the child is too young to read and understand the declaration. On top of this, many YouTube channels are monetised with ads playing pre-roll or mid-roll through the video, CARU (2017) ruled, in relation to toy unboxers, that this may mean that children will assume that the commercials have already played and will be less likely to suspect that the YouTube video itself is advertising (Evans, Grubbs Hoy and Carpenter Childers, 2018, pp.343).

There is no doubt of the attractiveness of toy unboxing videos to children and the appeal of toy unboxers as influencers. The genre offers the chance for the agentic child to be active content creator and vicarious consumer, but these videos, as legislators have highlighted, are often exposing young children unwittingly to commercial content that they are not able to identify.

2.4 CHILDREN AND BRANDING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

This sub-chapter examines the field of literature connecting children to branding. It aims to explore how young children relate to brands and will examine consumer buying behaviour models to see if these adequately describe children's drivers of brand choice in a digital world, where brand interactions can be online, offline or via a variety of channels in an omnichannel marketing approach. These brand choice drivers include the people and things that influence children. It will explore what meaning children ascribe to brand interactions, if they can and do develop engaging relationships with brands, and the strength of that relationship.

2.4.1 CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF BRANDS AS A CONCEPT

Keller (2013, p.30) defines brands as a 'name, logo or symbol' for a product that can create 'awareness, reputation, prominence... in the marketplace'. Branding matters to manufacturers as a way of identifying and protecting products but to consumers, it is a 'symbolic device', a 'signal of quality', and signifies a 'promise, bond or pact' with the maker (Keller, p.34). Even the youngest children (Weller, 2002) with limited reading skills will eagerly spot the golden arches of McDonald's through their car window or ask to watch something on CBeebies (the BBC's television channel for children), but can they grasp any meaning behind the name, logo, or symbol? Does that visual representation tell them anything about the product in relation to quality, attributes, or the brand's story?

The first issue to examine is whether children are aware of brands. Brand awareness according to Keller (2013, pp.73-74) is made up of brand recognition and brand recall;

recognition is when consumers can recognise brands that they have previously been exposed to, when given the brand as a cue; and recall is their ability to 'retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or a purchase or usage situation as a cue'. Essentially, would a child think of Kellogg's Coco Pops when they think about cereal, breakfast, or something quick to eat before school?

2.4.1.1 BRAND RECOGNITION AND RECALL

Existing research suggests that brand recognition starts at an early age. Ross and Harradine (2004, p.18) used a sports shoes and sportswear logo recognition exercise with primary school aged children aged 4 to 11 in the UK. Children aged 4 to 6 could recognise 68% of the brands (without naming the brand), but only 17% could name any of the brands correctly. In a class of 9 to 11s, 97% of the brands were recognised with 83% naming all six brands correctly. This is a small number of brands to test but the visual recognition was good, even with the youngest children, suggesting that the ability to recognise and recall the brand name increases quite rapidly between these two stages of cognitive development (if you follow Piaget's heuristic as outlined in Chapter 2.1.3.1).

A later mixed-methods qualitative study by Kinsky and Bichard (2011) of children aged 3 to 5 in the US also found good visual recognition of brands. The children recognised more logos by product classification than brand name, so even when the children were unsure of the brand, they could still place the product category. Children of this age are pre or early readers, relying on visual cues or their memory for the brand name. The authors accompanied the children and their parents to the supermarket which would have provided a strong product category driven cue for the children, so the placement of the product category is less driven by recall and more by visual clues. This assimilation of knowledge and connections was seen in action by Kinsky and Bichard (2011, p.154), as the children would 'often shout the names and point excitedly' as they spotted familiar products in the aisles.

McAlister and Cornwell (2010, p.203) also looked at the preschool age group of children aged 3-5, this time in Australia. They tested the children's brand recognition against a broad range of product categories with average recognition across all brand stimuli scoring a 'relatively low' 38.78% (Idem, p.221). They found that the recognised brands were more likely to be 'children's brands' than brands targeting teens or adults, concluding that they had 'emerging knowledge of brands that are relevant in their lives'. Other studies tend to select brands that are more likely to be in the field of experience for young children such as fast food, snacks, entertainment, and clothes, so it is hard to compare these results to other children's studies.

A study by Valkenburg and Buijzen (2005) went further by trying to establish if young children could recall brands as well as recognise them. This research targeted children in the Netherlands aged 2 to 8 to see if television advertising exposure had a cognitive effect on their ability to recall brands. They proposed that children's television viewing was found to be a predictor of brand recognition but not brand recall. They demonstrated that brand recognition starts earlier than brand recall with children aged 8 recognising 100% of the logos shown to them compared to children aged 2 recognising 67%; and children aged 2 to 3 hardly recalling any brand logos compared to children aged 8 recalling just under 50% (Idem, pp.464-5). The authors found the biggest increase in brand recognition occurred between 3 and 5 years, and the biggest increase in recall between 7 and 8 years. Although boys showed better awareness

and recall than girls, this was attributed to the influence of gender-specific product preferences in the logos selected for the study e.g., cars.

These studies all demonstrate that visual brand recognition develops at an early age and is certainly in place around 3-5 years old for brands in children's realm of interest or 'lived experience'. The assimilation of knowledge and connections follows with children starting to understand brands by linking them to their product categories. Proficiency in recall, in relation to naming brands or retrieving the brand name after seeing the visual logo, develops later, at around 7 to 8 years. This proficiency in brand awareness is not fully understood by parents; Harradine and Ross (2007, p.189) found that 'children [in the UK] tend to be brand aware at a younger age than their parents believe'. In their study, most parents thought their children became 'brand aware' from the ages of 6 to 8, but the researchers found that this was 'up to two years behind their actual level of brand awareness'. Older children of around 9 to 11 appear to have an even more sophisticated awareness, with Ross and Harradine (2004, p.18) noting that children were able to 'spot the difference between counterfeit products and the real thing'.

Children therefore appear to be savvier than their parents appreciate and with a reduced level of parental influence or supervision, and the 'age compression' (WARC, 2016) of this generation, there is concern regarding the ethical and legal regulation of advertising to children (discussed further in Chapter 2.2.3), as it is suggested that 'while brand recognition begins at a young age, advertising recognition does not' (Clough, 2016). It is unclear from these studies if advertising does drive that brand recall or if gender is an indicator of better recognition or recall.

2.4.2 DRIVERS OF BRAND CHOICE IN CHILDREN

Children from a young age are clearly aware of brands as a concept. They may not be able to put a name to brands initially, but they have a growing recognition of colours, visual cues, and the needs that the product fulfils. This leads us to the next consideration, at what point do children start making choices about brands and how do they do that?

Consumer buying behaviour models are established frameworks to help us understand how brands are selected. The traditional style models established with adults in mind look at a need recognition and problem identification, an information search, evaluation of alternatives, a decision, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Tuten, 2020, p.47; Chaffey and Smith, 2017, p.131).

Today's digital consumer experiences a digital ecosystem which is made up of countless influencers and channels, where consumers will experience different touchpoints with the brand and make several decisions leading ultimately to purchase (Tuten, 2020 p.56). McKinsey's consumer decision journey model (Court, et al., 2009, p.3) provides a digital path to purchase for consumers mapping four phases of decision-making in a circular fashion comprising: initial consideration, active evaluation, closure (purchase), and post purchase (experiencing the brand). In this model, a trigger or need starts the process, consumers include or exclude brands as they consider their needs with the initial brand set based on their recent experiences, and they select a brand 'at the moment of purchase'. The post-purchase

experience is where they will evaluate that experience and build expectations for their next buying decision. This is also where loyalty can build.

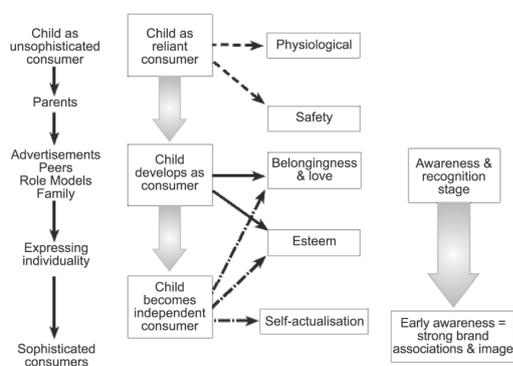
Although McKinsey's model is not that different visually to traditional models, it is based on extensive research which revealed that sources of influence today are much more consumer-based rather than marketing influenced, particularly at the information search and evaluation stages. Consumers are seeking out their own information, ratings or reviews on prospective brands and their initial consideration set is actually quite small (Court, et al., 2009, pp.3-4).

McKinsey's model, like the traditional models, is focused on adults. The family has been traditionally viewed as a decision-making unit and can also form a social influence (Tuten, 2020, p.46). The household is made up of individual members playing different roles in a purchase, such as initiator, influencer, decider, purchaser, and user. These roles can be undertaken by different members of the family for different types of purchase at different times (Brassington and Pettitt, 2006, pp.134-135). The pester power of children on household purchases has always been understood by marketers, and even encouraged, although this is now tempered by legislation (see Chapter 2.2.4). Children can certainly influence family purchasing and these models can reflect that, but they do not necessarily reflect children's active role in brand choice and preference in a digital environment where transactions are not always financial or may be perceived by the child as free because of a subscription or saved password e.g., playing or downloading a branded game, watching videos or other entertainment online, or downloading an app.

How can we then describe the active consumer buyer behaviour process for children in a digital environment and the associated influences on their brand choice when it comes to buying, adding something to a basket, downloading, choosing via a subscribed platform, or scrolling through branded content?

Ross and Harradine (2004, p.24) wanted to show the 'importance of marketers communicating with children at an early age' as seen in Figure 4: Overview of the Development of Children as Consumers and Key Influences, but this framework is a useful depiction of the development of children as consumers and key influences. It shows the child moving through developmental stages of reliance on parents, the 'influences of advertising, peers, role models and family before they develop as independent consumers' and uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs to show motivational forces for the child.

Figure 4: Overview of the Development of Children as Consumers and Key Influences



Source: Ross and Harradine (2004, p.24)

The authors are vague as to when the child becomes an independent consumer, but their contribution is directed at marketers building 'long-term profitable relationships in the future' – so, adulthood? It is also not based on a decision-making process for a product e.g., a one off or repeated transaction, but shows the movement of the child towards independence at a non-determined future point. It is however useful in thinking about potential influences from advertising, peers and role models, and the guiding hand of parents, as well as the motivational forces which may guide needs and wants.

Other studies have drawn on the influence of advertising, peers and family as drivers of brand choice in children. Estrela, Pereira and Ventura (2014, pp.245-6) found in their mixed methods study of Portuguese 8-11s that 'the media, television and the internet, the peers and the parents... can be a strong source of influence for the socialisation of consumption, and the representation of brands in the minds of children'. Parents in this study reported that advertising had a major influence on their children, and that those aged 11 in particular were able to interpret the 'discourse of advertising'. Similarly, an attitudinal study of Cypriot children aged 7 to 12 by Pagla and Brennan (2014, p.701) found children were influenced by families, peers and television ads, with older children having the additional influence of classmates and close friends.

It is not just older children who are influenced in their brand behaviours by close social influences. Chaplin and John (2005, p.121) found that some younger children in their study of children aged 8-13 in the USA showed a more advanced brand familiarity, when making self-brand connections, due to greater brand exposure from parents and older siblings.

Chaudhary, Lopez and Rodriguez (2020, pp.75-83) found that family was an important influence in brand choice with 'intergenerational influences' from parents and older relatives being passed to children 'as a part of a consumer socialisation process'. This suggests a transfer of brand preference, almost like an inheritance. Interestingly, parents underestimated the power of family as an influence on brand choice for children in a study by Harradine and Ross (2007, 195; 2004, p.23). A substantial 42% of a class of children aged 4-6 said family was a key influential factor, dropping to 16% amongst children aged 9 to 11 which the researchers found to be a 'sign of growing independence' (2004; p.23).

2.4.2.1 BRAND PREFERENCE

Bahn (1986) sought to explore when children gain the cognitive abilities to distinguish between brands within cereals and beverages product classes using Piaget's cognitive developmental stage theory as a framework, examining differences in children aged 4-5 in the pre-operational phase versus those aged 8-9 in the concrete-operational phase. In this test and repeat methodology, the children were reclassified in the second test by cognitive phase rather than age, so some young children were moved to the higher cognitive group and some older children moved down. Bahn found that the pre-operational children were less consistent in time in stating brand preference and the concrete operational set had a greater ability to differentiate between advertising and programming and discriminate between brands using more than one dimension. The study backs up Piaget's work (1964) in linking cognitive development with the child's ability to evaluate a brand within a product category against a series of attributes and develop a preference towards a brand. Those with more limited cognitive development can make assessments but on a more 'rudimentary level'. However,

this study's methodology only examined two narrow age bands before reclassifying the children according to cognitive development making the question of what age the abilities develop impossible to answer.

Research by Nairn, Griffin and Wicks (2008) into children's use of brand symbolism proposes 'consumer culture theory' as an alternative approach to Piaget's developmental cognitive psychology model. They were concerned that Piaget's model concentrated on chronological age, ignoring other factors such as gender, ethnicity and social class which could also influence children's interactions with brands. They used a qualitative brand sorting task with children aged 7-8 and 10-11 asking them to sort a diverse range of brands from pop stars, sports celebrities, television shows, toys to game consoles into 'cool' and 'not cool' piles. The researchers aimed to discover how the children 'interacted with the commercial world' to support their consumer culture theory approach.

The findings revealed that these children viewed brands as sources of fun and entertainment but were concerned and even quite cynical about the quality of brands, value for money and how they were marketed. Arguments over whether a brand was cool or not were based on gender differences, moral debates, and strong deep-rooted feelings. It could be argued that the term 'cool' is hollow and culturally transient; a badge that implies acceptability but does not probe into the true feelings and attitudes towards a brand. The use of this term therefore is limiting in this study, as the robust nature of the methodology could have led to some interesting deep insights into brand symbolism and the strength of those relationships – therefore there is opportunity for further research. The term 'cool' was applied in this study to brands that children felt were socially acceptable for a child of their age; hidden attitudes are clearly at play in the use of this nominal category. A girl of 7 will say she doesn't like the Disney film franchise Frozen and that it isn't 'cool' because children at Junior School mock it, however in the comfort of her own home she will happily watch and sing along with a younger sibling. However, identifying that some brands are more socially acceptable to children than others supports the use of consumer culture theory as an alternative to Piaget's cognitive development model. It appears that for today's modern sophisticated young consumers, age is not the only indicator of children's ability to interpret brand symbolism. Social influences including gender, power and a good understanding of commercialism appear to play a part and help explain the 'dynamic and complex social roles that brands play in children's everyday lives'.

McAlister and Cornwell (2010, p.224) used theory of mind to assess individual difference in children's social development and found that brand symbolism was understood earlier amongst children whose theory of mind is mature. They discovered that children as young as 3 'see other children as popular or unpopular, fun or boring, because of the brands they use' which they cautioned was 'early emergence of materialism'. This research also showed that children can prefer brands based on assumptions about its social standing which reinforces Nairn, Griffin and Wicks' findings (2008, pp.633-638) that some brands could be 'emotionally charged' to the point of becoming the object of 'hatred and violence'. This particularly relates to the torture of Barbie dolls which was explored in a conference paper by Greyson (2016).

2.4.3 CHILD BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

It is clear from the literature that children are aware of brands, can recall brands visually if not by name, and prefer some brands over another, which appears to be influenced by their families, peers and to some degree, advertising. What level of meaning do they place on these brands, and do they have a relationship with them, which may extend to loyalty? Do we know anything about relationships with brands online?

Haryanto, Silva and Moutinho (2015, p.374) looked at the formation of brand loyalty amongst Indonesian children aged 10 to 12 finding that 'brand personality, brand trust and brand salience were important ingredients for success in the children's segment' to create an emotional bond between the brand and the child. Brand loyalty was the result when this was linked to 'autobiographical memory and habituation'. This research certainly suggests that brand relationships are possible if loyalty can be formed, although for children of this age category, how habitual is their use of these brands and how many memories do they have of using that brand? A study by Braun-LaTour, LaTour and Zinkhan (2007) into earliest childhood memories of car brands supports the concept that children can have strong memories or stories about a brand that create an emotional connection. In their research, 80% of the earliest memories of their adult participants were for single experiences, at the average age of 6, which resulted in a strong relationship between that memory and their current car choice. Not only does this suggest that children in the preoperational stage of 2-7 can form strong and lifelong bonds to a brand, but that this connection can occur quite fundamentally at that very young age. Research by Ji (2002, p.383), again into car brands, found that 'child-brand relationships are influenced by the social environment where children live and grow' with children's affection for car brands matched to the brands owned by their parents and grandparents.

2.4.3.1 THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Lopez and Rodriguez (2018, pp.134-135) asked Mexican children aged 8 to 12 to identify positive and negative characteristics of brand relationships. Positive aspects included: saving their own money to buy the product; parents liking it too or showing their parents how to use it (reverse socialisation); sharing it with friends, bonding with friends by buying same product, setting a trend; social acceptance; making life easier; family time. Negative aspects included: parental imposition (parent buying it for them even though they didn't like it); social fear (peers don't like the brand); parents / siblings don't like the brand and comment; poor performance of the brand. For both positive and negative aspects, there was a very strong link to parental and peer approval.

This approval also featured heavily in a classification of the different qualities of child-brand relationships by Rodhain and Aurier (2016) based on a study of French children aged 10 to 11 and their views on clothing brands (Table 7: Qualities of the Child-Brand Relationship).

A chosen relationship was the ideal for children. Children thought the brand gave them a 'positive social status which nobody questions'. Parents and siblings were influential, and parents sometimes made a sacrifice to afford it.

An *imposed non-relationship / dream-like* was a desired relationship but parents refused the purchase that peers had suggested. This gave the children a 'feeling of frustration' that they were not in control of their identity or sense of belonging.

An *assumed non-relationship* was where the child did not want the brand relationship and the spheres of socialisation had not persuaded them to engage with the brand. They displayed a strong sense of self-esteem and resisted peer pressure.

An *imposed relationship* was not desired but, in this case, the child might wear a brand to fit in with peers or siblings. They would adhere to a 'set of standards represented by the brand and the people who have power over them, such as their parents or older brothers and sisters at home and their peers at school' (Idem, p.93).

Table 7: Qualities of the Child-Brand Relationship

Degree of Desire for Relationship	Consistent Socialisation Spheres	Inconsistent Socialisation Spheres
Desired Relationship	Chosen Relationship	Imposed Non-Relationship (Dream-like)
Undesired Relationship	Assumed Non-Relationship	Imposed Relationship

Source: Rodhain and Aurier (2016, p.92)

Rodhain and Aurier found that social interactions play a 'fundamental role' in constructing the child-brand relationship (2016, p.93) and children have low-esteem when brand relationships are formed because of peer pressure, a mismatch between parental values and their own, or when peers 'pressure them to wear brands their parents refuse to buy'. This only looked at physical spheres of socialisation and not the virtual world, such as influencers or virtual friends.

Chaudhary, Lopez and Rodriguez (2020, p.83) also attempted to categorise child brand relationships but this was based more on product categories and occasion of use, rather than the social sphere. They categorised Indian children's relationships with their favourite brands as fantasy (to be a hero or princess); yummy (food); identity construction (clothes, sports equipment); social bonding (fun, spending time with friends); technology (e.g., Apple, YouTube); and trusted.

Ji (2002) identified ten types of child-brand relationship (Table 8: Types of Child-Brand Relationship) although these were not mutually exclusive and could change over time. The criteria for determining that children have a brand relationship was based on Berscheid and Reis' work (1998) – that children should have memories of past interactions with a brand.

Table 8: Types of Child-Brand Relationship

Child-Brand Relationship Category	Meaning
First Love	Adoration, significant meaning to the child's development of self-concept and of gaining competence.
True Love	Nurtured over time through repeated usage, no substitutes, strong attachment, and high commitment.

Arranged Marriage	A non-voluntary union organised by a third party, low levels of affective attachment, may be a gift or purchased by parents for family use.
Secret Admirer	Child wants to own the brand and admires it but cannot obtain the brand e.g., limited resources.
Good Friend	Warm feelings, brand has desirable characteristics and provides personal pleasure.
Fun Buddy	Brand is associated with fun, happiness, and playfulness.
Old Buddy	A good memory of a brand used previously, may use the brand again if conditions permit.
Acquaintance	Child knows about a brand but has little knowledge or feelings for it.
One-night Stand	Child does not care about brand, has little knowledge, and uses what is provided by parents.
Enmity	Child hates the brand due to bad experiences or bad comments from other people.

Source: Ji (2002, pp.377-383)

The findings suggest the children in this study were able to retrieve stored information about brands and had developed a multitude of brand relationships (from negative to deep, emotional connections) that served 'certain functions and play[ed] important roles in their daily lives... The formation of relationships is also a process of developing possible selves such as becoming and being a girl, an athlete and a grown-up' (Ibid). These brand preferences were influenced by the social environment, namely parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends. This indicative study was based on one case family from the USA with children aged 7, 9 and 13 so it would be interesting to see if this categorisation would hold with a larger qualitative or more measurable quantitative approach.

Pecheux and Debaix (1999) went further than Ji (2002), Rodhain and Aurier (2016), and Chaudhary, Lopez and Rodriguez (2020) by examining the child-brand relationship quality for specific brands. They considered French children aged 8 to 12 to have sufficient cognitive development to be able to judge the attributes of selected brands in various product categories. To construct the scale, Pecheux and Debaix considered that adults purchase goods and services for hedonic or utilitarian reasons and used this as a starting point, hypothesising that the hedonic dimension would likely play a stronger role in children's consumer behaviour. The researchers initially conducted a qualitative study to identify the vocabulary and associations made by children when talking about brands and to generate a list of known brands which came from the entertainment, food and clothing categories. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert style scale for each brand name (Table 9: Pechaux and Debaix's Scale for Measuring Children's Attitudes Towards Brands); brands were not represented by visual cues such as ads, pictures or logos but the researchers checked that children knew the brands first.

Table 9: Pecheux and Debaix's Scale for Measuring Children's Attitudes Towards Brands

	Definitely Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Definitely Agree
Kellogg's—I like it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—It is fun.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—It is great.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—It is useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—I like it very much.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—It is practical/handy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kellogg's—It is useless.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: Pecheux and Debaix (1999, p.25)

Pecheux and Debaix concluded that their scale, as with the adult scale, was characterised by hedonic and utilitarian factors with the hedonic dimension being more important for children demonstrating that their relationship with brands is 'primarily an affective link'.

The fieldwork process and the statistical analyses were conducted with rigour to identify distinct factors for the scale; however, the fieldwork was conducted in French with the final scale translated into English for the journal article (Figure 5: English / French Translation of Children's Brand Attitudes Scale). The items and their translations do not match precisely e.g., cheerful and fun do not have the same meaning in English but are both used to translate 'gai' which translates better as cheerful or gay, rather than fun which would translate more effectively as amusement, rigolade or drôle (funny). This then overlaps with an additional item 'it is entertaining / amusing' (amusant: fun). Additionally, it is hard to see that 'useful' and 'practical/handy' work as separate items in English, particularly when applied by children to brands like Kellogg's or Coca-Cola. The attributes in English therefore are not mutually exclusive and cannot be treated with the same statistical confidence as the original French scale which was developed as part a multi-stage process of statistical refinement.

Figure 5: English / French Translation of Children's Brand Attitudes Scale

- I like it very much (*J'aime beaucoup*).
- I like it (*J'aime ça*).
- It is cheerful/fun (*C'est gai*).
- It is great/brilliant (*C'est génial*).
- It is entertaining/amusing (*C'est amusant*).
- It is useful (*C'est utile*).
- It is practical/handy (*C'est pratique*).
- It is worthless (*Ca ne vaut rien*).
- It is useless (*Ca ne sert à rien*).

Source: Pecheux and Debaix (1999, p.23)

With the study having been conducted circa 1999, it is likely that the descriptors generated by the children would differ if the fieldwork were repeated today due to language evolution. The four-point scale was selected by the researchers based on prior literature, however there is no consideration of why a neutral standpoint has not been provided and if children of this age are able to easily distinguish between the points. Regardless of the semantics, Pecheux and Debaix have provided a scale that provides a mechanism to measure the attitudes of pre-teen children with a good level of cognitive development (concrete-operational) towards brands in French using hedonic and utilitarian factors. Though the quality of the research is sound, the applicability of the scale for a contemporary English study is questioned.

2.4.3.2 BAD RELATIONSHIPS

Not all brand relationships are positive as highlighted by Rodhain and Aurier (2016) and Ji (2002). Some are unwanted (parent buys the child the brand) or the child feels forced to wear a brand because of peer pressure. Lopez and Rodriguez (2018, pp.134-135) found that children aged 8 to 12 in their study recognised that not all brand relationships were positive or sustainable, perhaps due to brands no longer being relevant, finding a better solution, or poor levels of service. Chaudhary, Lopez and Rodriguez (2020, p.77) also found that brand relationships could be damaged through brand transgressions defined as 'violations of consumer brand relationship relevant norms' which were not always the fault of marketers e.g., the child dropped the product on the floor and were not bought another.

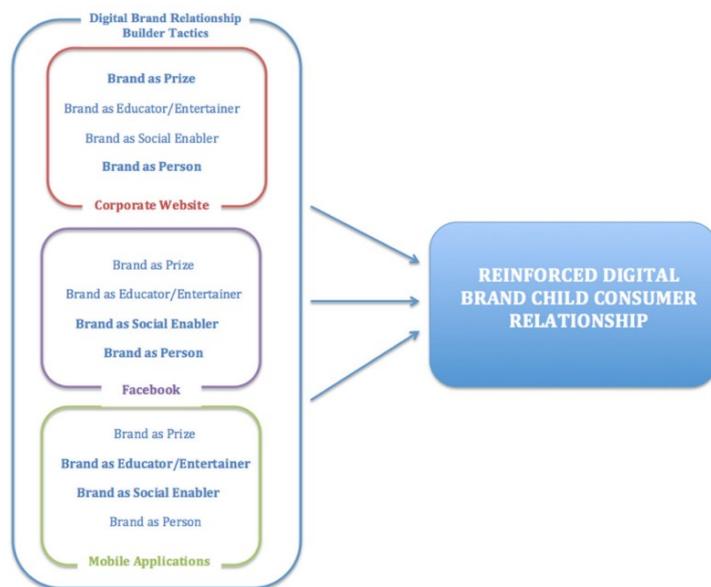
2.4.3.3 DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Can children have better relationships with brands in a connected environment? Confos and Davis (2016) certainly supported the potential for marketers to build relationships between young consumers and brands at an 'interactive, direct and social level' not seen in traditional media. They examined brand relationship building potential in the digital context for high fat, sugar, and salt food brands in Australia finding the branded communications strategies used by food companies online appeared to be 'creating conditions that appeal to young consumers and foster new ways to build brand relationships' in a way that was 'intense and potentially long-term'. They suggested that it was the 'immersive characteristic' that created the potential for a brand relationship linking this to Fournier's work (1998) with brands as an 'interactive partner with assigned human qualities' as brands could now converse and share in a two-way relationship.

In their definition of digital brand relationships (Figure 6: Children and Digital Brand Relationships), they defined four relationship builder tactics: brand as prize (sales promotions and competitions); brand as educator / entertainer (games, educational activities); brand as social enabler (social networking, challenges, tagging); brand as person (brand characters, profiles, status updates, anthropomorphised brands like Mr Pringle).

Although this study examines the digital environment of websites, Facebook and mobile, it looks at this purely from the marketer's perspective rather than a sample of children and how they respond or react to marketers' attempts to connect with them.

Figure 6: Children and Digital Brand Relationships



Source: Confos and Davis (2016, p.2009)

The idea of brand as an interactive partner, cited by Fournier (1998) and Confos and Davis (2016), is reinforced by Ji (2008, p.616) who claimed that 'having the opportunity to interact with a brand is an important factor in child-brand relationship formation'.

Jones and Glynn (2019, p.103) also discussed the benefit of interaction when examining the processes of 'discerning, reacting and forming', used by older children aged 11 to 14 in New Zealand interacting with brands on social media. These children appeared to be cognitively engaged in deeper processes 'than just recognising and recalling logos, brand characters or packaging'. The study showed that children were 'activating already-attained internalised symbolic brand knowledge' (Idem, p.100); showing readiness to act on the recommendations of their peers; and engaging in 'micro interactions that prompt children to forge a relationship with a brand' (Idem, p.101). This suggests that the digital environment is potentially more conducive to deep engagement with a brand for older children. Is this also the case for younger children? This is not conclusive.

A recent study by Nunez-Gomez, Sanchez-Herrera and Pintado-Blanco (2020) into Spanish children aged 8 to 14's engagement with brands through digital content claimed that 'the greater the consumption of the contents of a brand seen on social media, the greater the involvement of the child with that brand, strengthening their preference and establishing links that can intentionally last over time building loyalty' (Idem, p.14). The authors tested the 'adult language' used on the Consumer's Engagement with Social Media Brand-Related Content (CESBC) scale with groups of children and duly adjusted the language to suit the children's terms of reference. In this review of the survey language, the authors found that the 'concept of social media was confusing' to the children who could not distinguish between the 'internet' and 'social media' (Idem, p.6) with children only making a connection to the term 'social media' when a platform like YouTube was named. Despite these adjustments, the survey used statements like 'I like to follow my favourite brands on social media' and 'I like to share videos of my favourite brands on the internet' (Idem, p.8). The group interviews prior to the survey

indicate that the children would not interpret the term 'social media' without a connection to a named and known platform. It is also a little confusing to talk about 'sharing videos to the internet' when those videos would actually be shared to a named platform like TikTok or YouTube that would be recognisable to the children.

Therefore, it is hard to conclude whether it is the internet generally (branded websites, apps, programming) or social media platforms (YouTube, TikTok, etc) that is influencing young children's relationship with brands digitally and impacting on their brand preference and loyalty. In addition, almost all of the children in this sample were under the age of 13, the minimum age permitted by the terms of service of the principal social media platforms, so were these children accessing social media with fake ages on their profile or were they on social media at all? Consequently, there is a gap in our understanding of younger children's relationship with brands digitally and whether a deeper connection is fostered in the online environment.

Although these studies hint at the potential of the digital child-brand relationship, there are concerns about the transience of affinity online. Carr (2010, p.1437) found the 'shift from paper to screen' has influenced the degree of attention we pay to content and the depth of immersion. If children are engaging with branded content online, can they build a strong connection to the brand or is it fleeting? Carr noted that cognitive overload can stop us transferring information from 'working memory to long term memory and weave it into conceptual schemas' (2010, p.1958) which would prevent children from developing 'autobiographical memory' (Haryanto, Silva and Moutinho, 2015), emotional bonds or childhood memories (Braun-LaTour, LaTour and Zinkhan, 2007; Ji, 2002). Carr's research took place six years ago, and children are bombarded today by even more competing stimuli as they multi-task and multi-screen so this could be an issue.

2.4.4 THE STRENGTH OF CHILDREN'S BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

What drives children to like some brands more than others (RQ5)? This section will examine the key methods that marketers can use to assess the strength and popularity of children's brands in order to understand what types of brands or product category are most attractive to children.

2.4.4.1 WHAT IS A STRONG BRAND?

Kotler, et al., (2009, p.426) define the power of the brand as 'what resides in the mind of the consumer' with brands needing to create 'strong, favourable and unique brand associations with customers'. They spoke about brands 'forging a deep, lasting, intimate emotional connection to the brand that transcends material satisfaction' (Ibid), and drew on Kunde and Cunningham's Brand Religion Model (Figure 7: Kunde and Cunningham's Brand Religion Model) to explain how customers can develop beliefs about brands with weak brands performing a functional role, to the emotional values of concept brands, brands that represent a broader corporate philosophy, brands with cultures that consumers fully embed in their lives, and finally to brands with cult status, viewed as a 'way of life'. These brands at the top of the scale have high involvement, and strong brand values. Consumers have a deep and meaningful connection to these brands that they are involved with on a daily basis.

Figure 7: Kunde and Cunningham's Brand Religion Model



Source: Von Kunde and Cunningham (2002, cited in Kotler, et al., 2009, p.427)

In the eyes of the business world, a strong brand is one that performs well on the balance sheet. Brand equity is a method of acquisition accounting used by marketers to 'prove the long-term benefits of investment to potentially sceptical boardroom colleagues (WARC, 2020b). The quantification of brand equity is more challenging and there is no universally accepted means of measurement.

In the eyes of a child, a strong brand is likely to be one that they recognise and recall, such as McDonald's golden arches, with the brand studies examined in Chapter 2.4.1.1 noting strong recognition for food and sportswear brands in particular. A number of frameworks for assessing child-brand relationships were reviewed in Chapter 2.4.3.1. These looked at the general nature of the relationships but did not rate or rank specific brands to establish preference.

2.4.4.2 MEASURING BRAND STRENGTH

This section will look at frameworks, methodologies and mechanisms for measuring the strength of brands and brand relationship quality with young consumers. Unlike school and university league tables, brand listings are not designed for consumer use. Undeniably, they are a sales tool or hall of fame for branding and marketing agencies to demonstrate their ability to push brands to greater success year-on-year. Over the past thirty years, brand rankings have grown in status as the concept of brand equity took hold. This is the term used to explain the value of a brand that is recognised by consumers and enjoys the ability to command a price premium. Aaker (2013) describes brand equity as the 'set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service'. He identifies four dimensions of brand equity: brand loyalty, awareness, brand associations and perceived quality.

When brands are classified as financial assets, marketing activities become pivotal to the strategic direction of the company, with the success of the marketing plan contributing to the value of the brand on the open market. The value of an organisation cannot simply be taken from its 'non-current assets' and 'working capital' on the balance sheet. This is only the

baseline. The additional value is an intangible asset and is known in accounting as ‘goodwill’ (Walker, 2010, pp.66-68). Internally generated or non-purchased goodwill is not itemised on the balance sheet because it is subjective and fluctuates. Purchased (historical) goodwill is shown as an ‘intangible non-current (fixed) asset’ and is reviewed annually (Ibid).

Goodwill is a carrot, an opportunity or potential for a company to earn ‘super profits’ (Hague, 2009) from assets (brands) in the future. Brand valuations are critical to organisations’ financial standing, particularly if they wish to sell. Of course, there is no guarantee that a brand valuation will increase over time as it is dependent on consumer perceptions, competition in the marketplace, environmental drivers, corporate and brand reputation, and marketing activity. This is why the value of a brand must be confirmed or reassessed regularly (Ibid).

An evaluation, in its rawest form, is a financial measure, but consumers are willing to pay a premium for a brand because of the associations it holds (Kotler, et al., 2009, p.429). Consumers are not just paying for tangible goods but also the value it will bring to them. So, how do you count the value of a brand’s attributes, the status it brings to the user, its reputation, consumer cues, or its heritage? The principal brand valuation and market research companies fiercely compete to promote the quality and accuracy of their trademarked and quality standard (ISO) accredited methodologies to the world’s top brand owners. Interbrand, Brand Finance and BrandZ all aim to incorporate financial measures with a summation of the brand’s value in the eyes of the adult consumer. These methodologies include brands that are aimed at adults and children. Four methodologies are compared in the comparison table below (Table 10: Comparison Table of Brand Ranking Studies) to explore the techniques for measuring brand strength and what this might tell us about children’s relationships with brands.

Table 10: Comparison Table of Brand Ranking Studies

Listing Name	Interbrand Best Global Brands	Brand Finance Global 500	The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study	BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands
Purpose	Brand valuation methodology shows how brand is contributing towards business growth and supports strategic planning. Top 100.	Annual valuation of world's biggest brands across all sectors and countries. Bridges gap between marketing and finance. Top 500.	Syndicated study of kids and parent brand affinity and usage for use by youth and family marketers in the USA. Used as source data for industry reports used by Fortune 500 companies to track brand health and identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.	Tracks the value of the world's most valuable brands with insights on potential of strong brands. Lists the brands making the largest absolute \$ contribution to total value of parent company, considering current and projected performance.
Time Period	Annually	Annually	Annually	Annually

Listing Name	Interbrand Best Global Brands	Brand Finance Global 500	The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study	BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands
Criteria for Inclusion	Truly global' must have 30% minimum revenue from outside home region; significant presence Asia, Europe, North America and emerging markets; significant publicly available data on brand's financial performance; positive economic profit; public profile and global awareness.	Uses publicly available data and assumptions where data unclear; no set criteria for inclusion; all brands have potential for inclusion based on turnover.	379 brands across 19 categories in 2018 (syndicated research); study targets US kids and parents (sample 8,900 kids 6-12 and parents).	120,000 brands in 50+ markets; excludes the consumers who choose the brands for reasons other than branding e.g., price promotions, display.
Limitations	Some well-known brands will not fit the criteria of global, visible, growing, with transparent financial results. Does not cover smaller or regional brands. Not a complete picture of popular children's brands. Biased towards global and established brands.	Competing with Interbrand which is more established and well-known. More unwieldy with 500 brands. Doesn't publish detailed results by dimensions - only brand value and an overall rating so less transparent and useful for researchers/competitors. Complex method based on financial measures - loses the depth/richness of Interbrand dimensions.	Only targets US sample, syndicated so biased towards brands that are included (subscribers).	Excludes consumers who are not affected by brand equity e.g., price promotions or attracted by display, but can this be isolated? Only includes adults and children less impacted by price promotion.
Strengths	Recognised and long-established (1988). Brand valuation draws on market, brand, competitor and financial data into a single framework; backed by ISO 10668 (brand valuation accreditation).	All large brands have the potential to be included. Established methodology (1996). Accredited ISO 10668 (brand valuation) and ISO 20671 (brand evaluation). Highlights strong regional brands particularly from China.	Tailored towards children's brands and looks at both children's and parents' perspectives.	Recognised heavyweight research agency behind this study (Kantar Millward Brown); uses global on-going, in-depth quantitative consumer research covering 3.6m consumer interviews, looks at categories and markets for specific insights.

Listing Name	Interbrand Best Global Brands	Brand Finance Global 500	The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study	BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands
Dimensions	Financial performance (economic profit); role brand plays in purchase decisions (% of purchase decision attributable to brand as opposed to factors like price, convenience or product features); brand's competitive strength (ability of brand to create loyalty and sustainable demand and profit into future across 10 factors relative to other industry and global world class brands).	Brand valuation method called Royalty Relief. Estimate of likely future revenues attributable to brand by calculating a royalty rate (net economic benefit to a licensor for licensing brand on the open market). Uses calculation of brand strength using balanced scorecard (marketing investment, stakeholder equity, business performance), forecast of revenues and potential royalty rate.	Ranks brands on their 'Kidfinity' and 'Parentfinity' scores - measures of kid/tween and parents brand awareness, popularity and love. Scores are linked with brand usage, frequency, context and future usage data. Open-ended comments on why kids and parents love brands are analysed and combined with 30 drivers of kid and parent affinity. 'KIDFINITY is an aggregate measure of kids' brand awareness, love and popularity perceptions. Composite scores range from 0 to 1000, with most brands scoring between 400 and 900 points.'	Calculates Financial Value (proportion of total \$ value of parent company attributed to brand both current and projected performance); and Brand Contribution (proportion of financial value driven by brand's equity - ability of brand to predispose consumers to choose the brand over others or pay more based on perceptions).

Of the 100 top brands on the BrandZ Study (2019), only 23 were identified by an 11-year-old (convenience sample) as brands targeting children (Table 11: Children's Brands Ranked in Top 100 by BrandZ). Only one of those brands, Disney, could be called a pure children's brand (toys, entertainment, licensing arrangements) with the rest targeting families and adults much more broadly. Facebook was rejected by the sample child as a brand targeting older children (13+) although strictly speaking Instagram has the same age policy (see Chapter 2.2.4 for discussion on children and parents breaking age policies). According to this study, the most powerful brands in the world that appeal to children are fast-food giants like KFC and McDonald's, sports retailers, mobile phones and entertainment brands.

Table 11: Children's Brands Ranked in Top 100 by BrandZ

Drinks	Food	Entertainment	Tech	Retail	Misc.
Coca-Cola	KFC	Amazon (Ent/Retail)	Apple	Adidas	Colgate
Pepsi	McDonald's	Disney	Google	eBay	
	Starbucks	Netflix	Huawei	IKEA	
	Subway	YouTube	Instagram	JD.com	
			Microsoft	Nike	
			Samsung	Walmart	

Source: BrandZ (2019)

The Interbrand study whose methodology focuses on those organisations that are 'truly global' had 25 brands that could be identified as targeting children (Table 12: Children's Brands Ranked in Top 100 by Interbrand). Sprite was an addition to the drinks category, and Kellogg's to food. LEGO appeared as the only dedicated toy brand, and IKEA joined the list of retailers. While YouTube dropped off the Interbrand list, Spotify was in the top 100. Again, entertainment

and technology brands tend to be the biggest players. If we look at brands that purely target children, Disney appeared again, with the addition of LEGO.

Table 12: Children's Brands Ranked in Top 100 by Interbrand

Drinks	Food	Toys	Entertainment	Tech	Retail	Misc.
Coca-Cola	Kellogg's	LEGO	Amazon (Ent/Retail)	Apple	Adidas	Colgate
Pepsi	KFC		Disney	Google	eBay	
Sprite	McDonalds		Netflix	Huawei	H&M	
	Starbucks		Spotify	Microsoft	IKEA	
				Nintendo	Nike	
				Samsung		
				Sony		

Source: Interbrand (2018)

The Brand Love Study is a slightly different proposition as this does not include a financial evaluation but does examine affinity in depth for both parents and children in the USA. It specifically looks at the top 50 brands rated by children and their parents, addressing those brands that are in children's lived experience. In this study, Disney Channel is rated no. 21 by children, and LEGO at no. 15. If we examine the top 10 brands for US children (Table 13: Brand Affinity for Children and Parents in the USA), YouTube, McDonald's and Netflix make an appearance as per the brand valuation studies, but they are joined by smaller brands in financial terms, but ones that have much more meaning for children such as: M&Ms, Oreo, Doritos, and Crayola; in fact, 7 of the top 10 brands relate to food!

Table 13: Brand Affinity for Children and Parents in the USA

	Children (US)	Parents (US)
1	Oreo	Amazon
2	YouTube	Crayola
3	M&Ms	Netflix
4	Doritos	Google
5	McDonalds	Hershey's
6	Hershey's	M&Ms
7	Netflix	Doritos
8	Cheetos	Reese's
9	Chips Ahoy	Halos
10	Crayola	KitKat

Source: The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study (2018)

Parents appeared to underestimate their influence on children's brand choices in work by Harradine and Ross (2007, 195; 2004, p.23), so it is interesting to see that Brand Love's parent and child ranking also suggests a strong link between parent and child preference with half of the brands being liked by both groups (Table 14: Matches in Children and Parent's Brand Affinity (USA)).

Table 14: Matches in Children and Parent's Brand Affinity (USA)

Food/Snacks	Toys	Confectionery	Entertainment	Clothing / Sports
Cheetos	Crayola	Hershey's	Disney Channel	Nike
Chips Ahoy	Lego	KitKat	Google	
Cuties (Mandarin)		M&Ms	Netflix	
Doritos		Reese's	YouTube	
Eggo (Waffles)		Snickers		
Goldfish (Crisps/Snacks)		Twix		
Halos (Mandarin)				
Kraft Macaroni Cheese				
Lays				
Nestle Nesquik				
Oreo				
Pringles				

Source: The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study (2018)

Perhaps surprisingly, parents also rate unhealthy chocolate confectionery brands and crisps, and children are also keen on healthy branded mandarin oranges (easy peelers) which appear to be a mini-marketing phenomenon in the USA (Figure 8: Marketing Names for Mandarins).

Figure 8: Marketing Names for Mandarins



Source: Samuelson (2014)

Can we determine what brought these particular brands to the top of the ranking? YouTube, McDonald's and Netflix with their broad audiences are global giants appearing on the Interbrand and BrandZ rankings. Brands in the Brand Love study are ranked on 'Kidfinity' and 'Parentfinity' scores - measures of kid/tween and parents brand awareness, popularity and love. The popularity perceptions are based on 30 key drivers (Table 15: Key Drivers of Popularity in the Brand Love Study) relating to self-identification concepts, value, positive attributes, functionality, etc.

Table 15: Key Drivers of Popularity in the Brand Love Study

1	I can make it my own / personalise it (customisation)
2	Active / physical
3	Good for me / healthy / safe
4	A good value
5	I can buy it with my own \$ (affordable)
6	Made well / good quality (High quality)
7	Been around a long time (Heritage)
8	Has great varieties / options
9	Easy to use / do / make
10	Has great commercials / advertisements
11	Has a great website
12	Has a great app
13	Does good things for the environment / world
14	Convenient / portable
15	Exciting / adventurous
16	Tastes great
17	For whole family (all family)
18	For kids my age
19	For kids younger than me
20	For kids older than me
21	Good for connecting with others (social)
22	My Mum / Dad / let me have / use it (allowed)
23	Challenges / educates me
24	Gives me rewards / rewards me
25	Innovative / always has new things
26	Fun
27	Different / unique
28	Cool / trendy
29	Looks good / good design
30	Hard to get / find (elusive)

Source: The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study (2018)

This list of popularity drivers is not dissimilar to the child-brand relationship descriptors identified in Chapter 2.4.3.1 but allows for a robust ranking when combined with other measures of brand usage, frequency, context and future usage data.

2.4.4.3 MEASURING DIGITAL BRAND STRENGTH

How can brands be assessed on their popularity and ability to capture children’s attention digitally? One way to measure the quality of the user-brand relationship is through digital metrics such as sentiment analysis and the Net Promoter Score. Sentiment analysis is the measurement of emotion in online content. A sentiment ratio can calculate the ‘proportion of positive to neutral to negative comments in social media’ (Waite and Perez-Vega, 2018, p.177). Individuals who have positive sentiment towards a brand are likely to share positive comments with their networks and can be rewarded by marketers. Neutral sentiment can be addressed by tackling concerns or engaging in dialogue (Idem, p.179) and negative sentiment

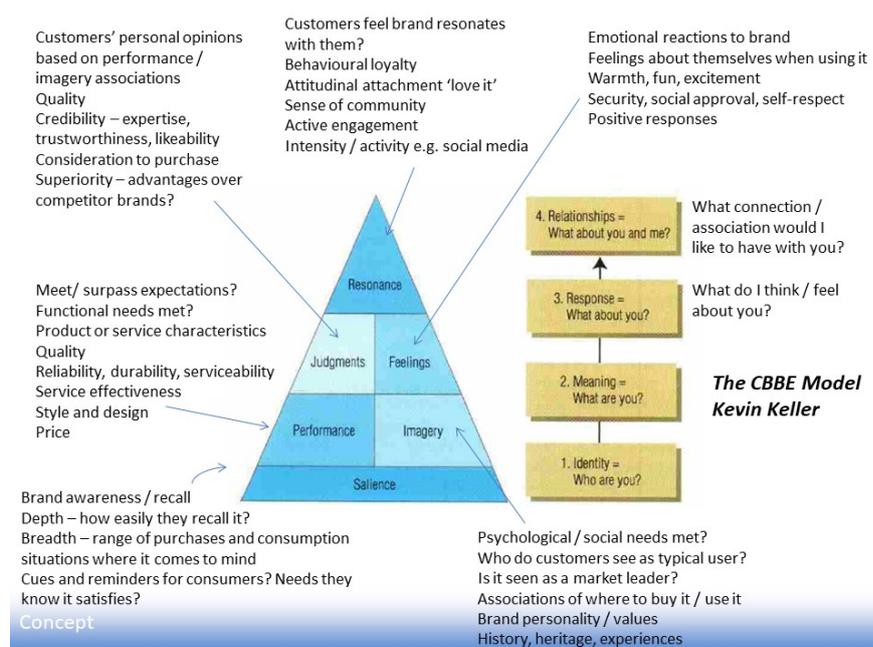
should be dealt with carefully to avoid further escalation. The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a measure of willingness to recommend and divides customers into promoters, passives and detractors. The percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters to provide a negative or positive NPS (Idem, p.182).

Of course, primary school aged children shouldn't be using social media and making comments, although some are. Ethically, this is not a method that could be employed by marketers to assess child-brand relationships but the principles of identifying comments about brands that are positive, neutral or negative, or comments that talk about recommendations can be gleaned through content analysis strategies for qualitative research (and will be done in this study).

2.4.4.4 BRAND STRENGTH MODELS

Keller developed the Customer Based Brand Equity model as a 'series of steps for building a strong brand' (Figure 9: Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model). It looks at brand awareness and recall, performance and imagery, judgements and feelings, and resonance. Brand identity sits at the base of the pyramid and marketers can try to build the brand through the stages towards resonance, where customers enjoy a close relationship with the brand, actively seeking to 'interact with the brand and share their experiences' (Keller, 2013, pp.132-133). Keller states that the 'true measure of the strength of a brand depends on how consumers think, feel and act with respect to that brand' (Idem). Although this model is not based on children and their relationships with brands, it does identify dimensions that are common to some of the child-brand relationship studies such as opinions on performance, emotional feelings, awareness and recall, and self-identification, and also shows a movement towards a stronger relationship on the part of the consumer with more emotional connections, much as the child-brand relationship quality models showed in Chapter 2.4.3.1.

Figure 9: Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model



Source: Keller (2013, pp.132-133); Adapted by Author

2.4.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This sub-chapter has explored relevant literature relating to children and branding. Traditional consumer buying behaviour models have been updated for digital environments but are not specifically related to children's growing agentic ability to engage with brands online (RQ3). Primary research can help to fill the gap on how they could better reflect the process.

Understanding how children make brand choices in a digital environment is not entirely clear, but family, peers and advertising could potentially play a similar role to the offline environment (RQ1). Equally, it is unclear if children have more freedom to form brand relationships online (RQ2) compared to offline e.g., more 'chosen relationships' (Rodhain and Aurier, 2016).

Previous studies have identified popular brands from children's 'lived experience' (McAlister and Cornwell, 2010) within categories such as food, clothes and sports brands, and more broadly pop stars, sports celebrities, television shows, toys and game consoles (Nairn, Griffin and Wicks, 2008), but there may be additional categories of interest online (RQ5).

Although some of the studies examined moved away from Piaget's theories of childhood development to consumer socialisation theory, none specifically identified reliable differences by gender or another demographic factor. Despite criticism, all studies have chosen children by age or school class and compared different age bands to each other to test development and differences, so whilst consumer socialisation theories offer useful insights into the social worlds of children, it does not seem incompatible with the concept of children's cognitive development. Therefore, there is still a gap in understanding whether there are any firm demographic differences in online brand behaviour and interactions for children.

This section has looked at various ways to describe and categorise children's brand relationships and to understand how they differ in a digital environment, so how can this be conceptualised? The digital nature of those interactions is not as well understood from the published literature. Fournier (1998, pp.366-368) focused on brand relationship quality to 'capture the strength of the connection' between the consumer and brand with 'relationship stability over time' but with more 'conceptual richness' than the concept of brand loyalty. Her study related to adult consumers, capturing six dimensions: love/passion (beyond base levels of brand preference); self-connection (identity, sense of self); interdependence (frequent interactions, intensity of interaction, part of daily life); commitment (emotional, longevity); intimacy (brand meaning, personal associations, experiences); and brand partner quality (satisfaction, strength of relationship, performance of brand in its partnership role – dependability, reliability, etc). Although Fournier's research did not look at children as consumers, or interactions with brands on digital platforms, it is worth exploring its relevance to this study.

Fournier's dimension of 'love and passion' (1998, pp.363-364) moves consumers beyond 'simple notions of brand preference'. Consumers feel something is missing when they do not use the brand or have any touchpoints with it, described as a separation anxiety (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012, p.13). Although the word 'love' used to describe a relationship with a brand seems extreme, it relates to 'product love' and the 'focused attention' or 'adoration' that a consumer has for the product (Ji, 2002, p.388). Fournier used references to interpersonal relationship research in her study. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012, p.5) found consumers rate brand love second to interpersonal relationships, were more concerned about what the

brand could do for them rather than an altruistic concern for the brand, and brands could not return the consumer's love in an emotional way; of course, brands can return love through competitions and giveaways, or perhaps by liking a consumer's generated content e.g., a photo, comment or video on social media.

Self-connection relates to the consumer's identity and sense of self and can range from 'past (nostalgic) to current and future (possible or desired) selves' (Fournier, 1998, p.364). A new parent might connect to a baby brand because they remember their own parents using the brand in their childhood or with their siblings. A child might explore digital content relating to a fast sports car brand because they aspire to own one in the future. Croghan, et al., (2008, p.350) conducted a photo-elicitation study with young teenagers to examine the intersection between consumption of goods and the construction of youth identity. They found that young people were far more likely to emphasise the 'familial and relational aspects of their experience' to its 'commodification', e.g., a young boy showed his self-connection to a well-known rock band brand through his clothing and lifestyle presented in the photos.

Interdependence between the consumer and the brand can result in a strong brand relationship (Fournier, 1998, pp.364-365). This means the consumer has frequent interactions with the brand with it potentially being part of their daily life or routine. The interactions may also have a higher intensity and meaning. Online games like Roblox and Fortnite became an important part of children's everyday lives during the lockdown in the UK playing the role of 'virtual playground' where children could 'chat, hang out and play' with their friends (WARC, 2021b) whilst they were legally confined to their homes, apart from a daily walk.

High-level commitment between the consumer and brand is typical in strong brand relationships (Fournier, 1998, p.365). Confos and Davis (2016, p.2008) found that the nature of the online environment means young consumers can develop 'intense and potentially long term' brand relationships. Consumers are likely to state their loyalty to the brand in the longer term and may have emotional connections. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012, p.14) suggested brands could nurture this commitment through loyalty programmes and brand community social media pages.

While the interpersonal relationship theories adopted by Fournier (1998) talk about love and passion between two people, intimacy is the deeper connection that they can achieve once they have got to know each other, learning about their past, their present, and their hopes for the future. In the sense of brand intimacy, this dimension is all about brand meaning, personal associations and experiences. In Fournier's research (1998, p.365), brand meaning was built through 'beliefs about superior product performance', advertising cues like slogans, jingles or brand characters, using personal 'nicknames' for brands like Maccie Ds for McDonald's, and memories of 'personal associations and experiences'. Vloggers as a personal brand are also able to create a strong sense of intimacy for their fans. Jerslev (2016) commented that by vlogging from her bedroom and displaying a 'sense of an authentic self' with her straight to camera style of communication, Zoella was able to use 'strategies of connectedness, accessibility and intimacy'.

Brand partner quality can lead to overall relationship satisfaction and strength in the eye of the consumer. Fournier's research (1998, p.365) suggested that consumers should feel 'wanted, respected, listened to and cared for', that consumers should feel positive about the brand's dependability, reliability and predictability, trust that the brand will deliver, and that it takes 'accountability for its actions'. In Ji's research (2002, pp.382-383), children had feelings of enmity towards brands that failed to demonstrate they were a good quality brand partner, such as trying a kids shampoo brand that had been recommended as good for tangles but didn't

work or buying a new variety of chips that 'tasted really bad'. Children may not be able to fully judge whether a brand takes accountability for its actions, but they are becoming much more aware of social issues because of influential young climate activists (Bramwell, 2019) spreading messages and awareness via popular video sharing platform TikTok.

Could these dimensions from Fournier's research also apply to children? They certainly offer dimensions of likeability like Ji's (2002) ten category scale; concepts of self-connection like Chaplin and John (2005); commitment (Haryanto, Silva and Moutinho, 2015; Braun-LaTour, LaTour and Zinkhan, 2007; Ji, 2002); and interdependence with digital interactions (Confos and Davis, 2016; Jones and Glynn, 2019); but are intimacy and brand partner quality as useful for a younger target group? This is a gap in our knowledge.

To contextualise this framework around children, the key drivers of popularity in the Brand Love Study (2018), a children's study, are mapped against Fournier's brand relationship quality dimensions (1998, pp.366-368); this can be seen in Table 16: Conceptualising Digital Child-Brand Quality Relationships. These descriptors are used in Brand Love's robust and quantified brand tracking tool and broadly match the themes identified in the reviewed child-brand quality studies in Chapter 2.4.3.1, namely self-identification concepts, value, positive attributes, and functionality. They provide some acknowledgement of digital indicators in the 'Interdependence' dimension with drivers such as 'Good for connecting with others (social)', 'Has a great website', 'Has a great app', and 'Convenient/Portable'. It is proposed that Fournier's model, used in conjunction with the children's branding study descriptors, may be an appropriate way to explain the quality of children's relationships with brands in a digital environment.

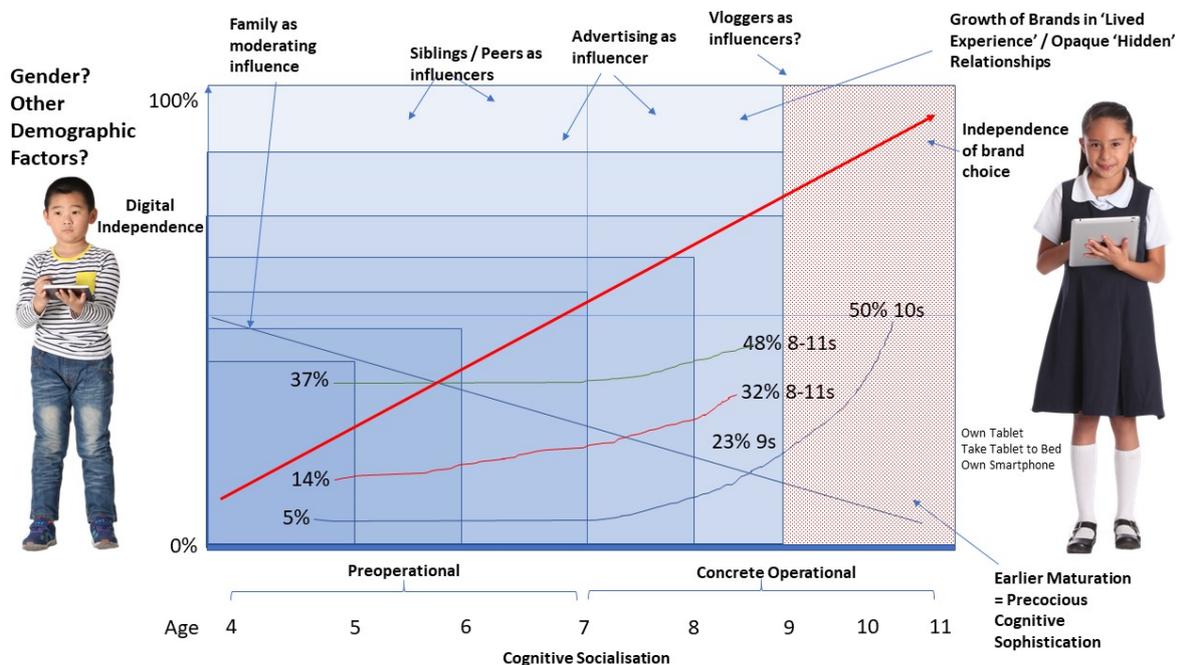
Table 16: Conceptualising Digital Child-Brand Quality Relationships

Love/Passion (beyond base levels of brand preference)	Self-connection (identity, sense of self)	Interdependence (frequent interactions, intensity of interaction, part of daily life)	Commitment (emotional, longevity);	Intimacy (brand meaning, personal associations, experiences)	Brand Partner Quality (satisfaction, strength of relationship, performance of brand in its partnership role – dependability, reliability, etc)
Tastes great	I can make it my own / personalise it (customisation)	Innovative / always has new things	I can buy it with my own \$ (affordable)	Has great commercials / advertisements	Gives me rewards / rewards me
Has great varieties / options	For kids my age	Good for connecting with others (social)	Been around a long time (Heritage)	Hard to get / find (elusive)	A good value
Looks good / good design	For kids younger than me	Easy to use / do / make		Active / physical	Does good things for the environment / world
Cool / trendy	For kids older than me	Convenient / portable			Made well / good quality (High quality)
Fun	Good for me / healthy / safe	Has a great website			
Different / unique	For whole family (all family)	Has a great app			
Exciting / adventurous	My Mum / Dad / let me have / use it (allowed)				
Challenges / educates me					

Source: Fournier (1998, pp.366-368); The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study (2018)

How are these brand relationships formed in the first place? It is proposed that children from a young age are engaging independently in a digital environment with brands and making their own brand choices. This agentic behaviour in the digital landscape is described in the conceptual framework in Figure 10: Conceptual Framework: Brand Drivers for the Agentic Child in the Digital World.

Figure 10: Conceptual Framework: Brand Drivers for the Agentic Child in the Digital World



Data Sources: Ofcom (2019); Harradine and Ross (2007, p.195; 2004, p.23)

Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

The interactions of these young consumers with brands in the digital landscape is conceptualised using a timeline. The ages of the children span the years spent in primary school in the UK from the ages of 4 to 11, and also relate to Piaget's preoperational (age 2-7) and concrete operational (age 7-11) segments (1964). This axis shows children's consumer socialisation particularly in a cognitive fashion as they develop a growing understanding of advertising and commercial influences.

The left-hand axis shows the percentage of digital independence displayed by children. Three key statistics have been mapped onto the chart, which are from the bottom up, 'own a smartphone', 'take tablet to bed' and 'own a tablet'. These figures show children's access to devices, their independent use of devices at bedtime (presumed unsupervised), and the significant growth between the age of 9 and 10 when children gain increased access to a smartphone; this is probably one with a contract or pay as you go mechanism as children in the final year of primary school prepare for the additional freedom and rite of passage of attending secondary school.

The shaded blue rectangles illustrate the growing number of brands in the child's frame of reference or 'lived experience' as it has been termed by previous researchers. These are coloured opaque to represent the growth of brands that children are predicted to be engaging

with in an online environment (this will be explored in the primary research), which are potentially brands that the parents are not aware of.

Let's not rule parents out of the picture; they are mapped using data from Harradine and Ross (2007; 2004) to explain how they perform a key moderating influence for young children, but this does decrease substantially by the age of 11. Siblings and peers appear to be an influence for all ages. Advertising becomes more of an influence as children reach the concrete operational stage, but creative and advertising intention is also assessed more critically by the oldest age group. It is suggested that vloggers may also be an influence although this has not been seen in the literature. Social media may be an influence, but this is a sensitive topic as children should not be able to browse content from these sites in this age group.

On the left-hand side, gender and other demographic factors are given a question mark; it is not entirely clear from the literature how these may impact upon the framework.

The red column on the right-hand side is a critical spot. As can be seen from the red arrow, it is proposed that children are showing increasing independence in brand choice in a digital environment as they move towards the ages of 9 to 11. At the same point, they have access to their own smartphone, are possibly using social media illegally (possibly with parent approval), have an increased number of brands in their 'lived experience' some of which may be opaque and 'hidden' from their parents, alongside an earlier maturation due to the physical and emotional processes identified in Chapter 2.1.6.1. This has been termed as a 'precocious cognitive sophistication'; of course, as has been discussed, children develop at different rates and not all children will engage online in the same way, but there is a concern that some children may be engaging with age-inappropriate brands or may be fooled by false advertising (fake profiles set up with real brand logos).

The primary research for this study, which will be set out in the next chapter, will explore whether this conceptual framework and the adaptation of Fournier's brand relationship quality dimensions fully explain children's relationships with brands in a digital environment.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter will both explain the procedures for the primary research which will test the conceptual framework as well as seeking to answer, in the most part, the answer to RQ4, by investigating the best way to explore children's own views and potentially changing and more agentic behaviours.

In Chapter 3.1, children's agency will be examined in connection to the power relationship between the qualitative researcher and the child participant in the research encounter. Thinking about agency and participation suggests the need for research designs and methods that allow children more input, so in Chapter 3.2, the nature of participation and participative techniques will be reviewed.

Chapter 3.3 looks at the development of ethical research with children and addresses the challenges of researching very young children. Finally, in Chapter 3.4, the research procedures will be outlined, including the research design, theoretical lens, methodological approach and details on data collection and analysis.

3.1 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE IN CHILDREN'S RESEARCH

The concept of children's agency introduced through the 'new sociology of childhood' (James and Prout, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.207), with the idea of child as subject, not object, highlighted the need to carefully consider how to research children's views. The nature of the ephemeral relationship between the adult researcher and young participant demands careful consideration in qualitative research where the researcher is intrinsically linked to the process of producing the data and generating the subsequent analysis. Indeed, Bryman (2004, p.284) suggests participants' responses are shaped by the researcher's characteristics and interpretation 'profoundly influenced' by the researcher's 'subjective leanings' and empathy towards or relationship with a participant.

Besides this implicit bias, fieldworkers conducting research with children are influenced by their view of child agency; although researchers may acknowledge children's capacity, they may equally recognise that they are themselves a barrier to this free speech. By guiding the discussion or using their adult status to keep the conversation on track, researchers use their authority over the child to influence the research process.

Participative techniques used frequently within focus groups and depths involve the sample in 'some or all stages of research from problem definition through to dissemination and action' (Mayhew, 2009), providing a more collaborative and empowering exchange between the two parties, thus shifting the balance of power. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) counsel against the 'naïve' and dominant use of participatory approaches questioning whether they are necessary for children to exercise their agency and construct knowledge about themselves. In today's digital society, many children are in fact exercising their independent agency everyday as they use smartphones and tablets unsupervised to entertain, inform, communicate, and express themselves (Ward, 2016).

The dynamic between the researcher and child participant is therefore influenced by views of the child's agency, the use of participatory approaches, and forms of power or relationship between the two parties. These relational forms have been conceptualised as membership

roles by Adler and Adler (1987) categorised by the level of participant involvement. The practical application of these roles is complex as discussed in this chapter, but it is applied, perhaps most provocatively by Mandell (1988) who advocated a 'least-adult' childlike standpoint. Many questions remain about the application of these roles in fieldwork. Previous studies cited in the literature suggest a variable success rate with children often perceiving the projected role differently or using their power to subvert the researcher's intentions. It appears that no research has considered specifically how successfully the researcher's projection of a role is interpreted by the participating children. This will be addressed through this study by testing the researcher's projected role with the children's interpretation at the end of their first qualitative interview.

Researching children's relationship with brands, requires a clear understanding of the best way to research their attitudes and opinions towards their use of digital devices and their engagement with websites and apps. This understanding can only be reached via the use of an appropriate methodology and interviewing approach between the adult researcher and the child participant. This methodological literature review seeks to untangle the range of membership roles that qualitative researchers could potentially take when interviewing young children, considering the types of power relationship and children's agency, and how these roles might be both presented and perceived to develop a new conceptual framework for the role of the qualitative researcher in children's research, with applicability to both marketing and social research studies.

3.1.1 CHILDREN AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Acknowledging children as active agents (James and Prout, 1997) through research methods can be challenging to achieve in practice. Co-creation methodologies (where stakeholders come together to create a solution for mutual benefit), encourage the participant to move from subject to a co-director and producer of the outputs, and are useful in consumer research e.g., the child designs the toy of their dreams (MRS, 2016). Certainly, children are imaginative and creative but, as research director Andrew Therkelsen commented in 2010, 'what makes children good at co-creation can conversely make them potential nightmare respondents... [when unmanaged], due to their 'lack of strategic choice and rigorous thinking'. This suggests that, even with an egalitarian co-creation strategy, there is a power dynamic at play, 'employing' the child participant to act and behave in a way that facilitates outcomes on the grown-up's terms.

Therkelsen (2010) found some of his agency's best work for publishers was conducted with children in their bedrooms next to their bookshelves. This entry into a child's space, the centre point of their personal geography, reinforces the assertion by Robinson and Kellett (2004) that the power relations between the adult interviewer and child participant are impacted by the 'researcher's views about child status'. The researcher, and by default, the parent/guardian who grants permission for their child to participate will hold views on whether a minor is a competent subject, if they can make a judgement, hold rational or personal opinions of their own, and have rights over themselves as 'a citizen' (Lewis, 2004, p.5).

3.1.2 THE MEANING OF POWER

The balance of power during a research interview with younger participants is clearly important. Haugaard (2002, pp.1-4) states there is no single definition of power that covers all forms of usage, for each form of social or political power 'takes place within local, tacit or explicit theoretical systems'. In practice, this means the researcher may design the course of an interview or observation to influence research outcomes. The researcher may be granted temporary authority during an in-school interview to discipline a child whose behaviour deviates from student codes of conduct. Equally, a child may seize control of proceedings by refusing to co-operate, losing concentration, misbehaving, or simply doing something they want to do; whereas another child may cooperate and contribute to the activity as 'expected'.

3.1.2.1 POWER-KNOWLEDGE NEXUS

Foucault theorised power's connection to knowledge and the relationship between the individual and institutions, such as a school, therefore his work within postmodern social theory has been considered. Four key principles are identified by Schirato, et al., (2012, pp.45-49) from Foucault's lectures (1973-74) as follows: power is not a possession, it is a 'system of relations spread throughout society' (Mills, 2003, p.35); power is not a negative concept as it is 'productive in its effects'; power can only be understood by connecting it to 'forms of knowledge and discursive practices'; and 'any relation of power can be resisted'.

If power is not a possession 'any more than it is something that emanates from someone' (Foucault, 1974), then neither the researcher nor the child can own it. If neither party owns power, either party could take it during the interview, they could share it using a co-creation methodology, or the researcher could empower the child through participative methods to choose activities or lead the conversation.

Foucault sees power as a force in all relations in society and institutions, as individuals 'actively play a role in the form of their [power] relations with others and with institutions' (Mills, 2003, p.35). As if in a play, power is performed in a particular context: the actor might yield to the force, contest it, or react according to the relations they hold within a family, social context or within an institution that bounds their behaviour. Applying Foucault's theory to this case, a child may adhere to predetermined behavioural codes in a research interview held at school or home because of the pre-existing relationships with their parents/guardian/school where a clear system of relations dominates, e.g., all children must be polite to visiting adults.

A system where adults are preordained to have power because of their grown-up and professional status would hamper a researcher looking to create a pure co-creation or participative methodology. Well-behaved and obedient children may say what they think the researcher wants to hear or agree to an activity because of pre-existing power structures and the associated benefits i.e., research incentives and school reward systems as part of 'positive discipline' strategies (Nelsen, 2006).

Foucault (1978, p.36) said power is not just repressive but productive, 'shaping people, their dispositions and values, and their practices' (Schirato, et al., 2012, p.46), suggesting the use of power can be positive, but this is only through conformity, i.e., children are constrained by rules and are both incentivised and checked daily by the prevailing disciplinary system of reward and punishment. If power is a positive force on children, through their social order and

school's constraints, it supports their acquisition of life skills, learning and knowledge to become active and positive contributors to society in adulthood. However, this conceptualisation indicates that in a market research study, children are not wholly free to behave or participate as they might wish, and this would go against more contemporary approaches to child agency such as: child-led parenting styles; student-centred learning; and participative, self-directed, and co-creative research methodologies.

The third principle is that power can only be explained by 'its connection to forms of knowledge and discursive practices' (Schirato, et al., 2012, p.48), indeed Foucault suggests we should forgo the idea that 'knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended, and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, and its interests' (1977, p.27). This suggests that the process of collecting primary data leading to insight and new knowledge cannot be separated from power relations between the researcher and child. It implies that it is impossible to remove power from the equation, but from Foucault's examples of this in practice, the use of power can create discourse around social issues, which could provide social benefit as well as new forms of knowledge.

The final principle proposes that where power is exercised, resistance will follow and that this is an integral part of power relations. Schirato, et al., (2012, p.49) comment that, 'all practices of power produce their residue that resists being recuperated into their field of operations'. This can be applied in relation to categories of people or forms of behaviour that will not conform or follow the prevailing system e.g., children who are expelled from school. This is key where children may not yield to a designated authority figure to behave in a particular way or to co-operate with the researcher's objectives.

Pure acceptance of this principle could be concerning in children's research, particularly social research, where some children's voices are not heard due to a lack of engagement, rejection of the methods, the challenge of participation in the set methodological form, or failure to be included in the sample (Grover, 2004; Elton-Chalcraft, 2011; Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller, 2005).

Again, Foucault's work is based on historical accounts and life in the 1970-80s where different approaches to childrearing and views of childhood prevailed. However, despite modern parenting practices that are more child-led, primary schools are under pressure to deliver results based on challenging key performance indicators that can only be attained through pressurised teaching environments and strict adherence to behavioural policies. Despite the recognition of children's agency, it is only realised and acknowledged within the constraints of disciplinary systems in contemporary institutions.

3.1.2.2 SOCIOLOGICAL POWER PERSPECTIVES

Researchers have debated Foucault's conceptualisation of power alongside newer concepts of child agency and children's participation in market and social research. Gallagher (2008b) drew on Foucault (1977) and De Certeau (1988) to argue that 'power could be re-conceptualised as a form of action carried out through multivalent strategies and tactics, rather than a commodity or a capacity.' However, he criticises participative methods for regulating children under the guise of empowerment (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

Like Foucault (1977), Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) concede that the actions of participants 'places them beyond the control of the researcher'. Power leads to resistance and children may 'exploit, appropriate, redirect, contest or refuse participatory techniques' (Gallagher, 2008b). Holland, et al., (2010) positioned themselves with Foucault (1977) and Gallagher (2008b) in seeing power between the adult researcher and the child participant as 'both a productive and repressive force' that is both empowering and constraining in different contexts. They view power as 'dynamic and relational' within a 'nexus of power relations' moving away from a position where the 'researcher always already embodies power' and the participant 'powerlessness' whilst appreciating that adults have more opportunity to direct the research process than the children studied.

Gallagher's criticism of a participatory approach as a solution to empowering the child as a social actor, illustrates the complexity of managing the researcher-child relationship. Researchers entering the school are temporarily enmeshed in a pre-existing and complicated network of power relationships (2008a; 2008b) between pupils, teachers, senior leadership, parents, education authorities, research sponsors, and ethical committees. The often ad-hoc nature of research also restricts the time involved with participants to develop rapport and trust; the nature of power is therefore temporal with high stakes as the adult needs the child to co-operate; the child has the right to withdraw; the headteacher/parent/guardian can prevent access to the child; and the child wishes to gain an incentive for participating.

Foucault's power-knowledge nexus provides a useful starting point for consideration of the conceptualisation of power within the new social construct of childhood with Gallacher and Gallagher's work (2008) challenging the ease of attaining a power balance between the researcher and the child in research encounters with participative approaches. The next section will draw on additional contemporary writers to re-conceptualise power relationships when conducting research with young children.

3.1.2.3 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF POWER

In qualitative research, a subjective ontological approach would be one where the 'perceptions and actions of social actors create social phenomena' (Wilson, 2014, p.11) with both the researcher's views and behaviour contributing to data production. The literature indicates four tenets of power relationship, between children and adult researchers, which are conceptualised here:

Sharing Power Relationship: indicates equality in the power held by the researcher and child, recognising the child as subject and social actor rather than object but acknowledging the researcher's guiding hand throughout the discussion. Empowers the child to act as co-researcher or choose participative methods and can 'reduce social difference' by 'strengthening' children's voices (Randall, 2012). Carter and Ford (2013) reduced power imbalance by using drawing and photo elicitation methods; Chitakunye (2012) made children active co-researchers to 'transform power relationships'; and Banister and Booth (2005) asked children to view themselves as 'partners' sharing ownership of data and findings.

Submissive Power Relationship: the researcher yields or loses power to the child. Full empowerment over participative activities or a child-centric approach are possibilities, but equally this could illustrate the researcher's failure to conduct the interview successfully

with the child taking advantage of an adult perceived to lack power such as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) who lost control of their notepad. Holland, et al., (2010) planned a collaborative approach but this resulted in 'sanitised research results'. Equally, Yee and Andrews (2006) were aware of the 'asymmetry in power relationships' between parents, children and researchers during in-home research with some children subverting interviews by leaving the room or refusing to answer questions. However, Hunleth (2011), Kellett (2004), and Kuchah and Pinter (2012) all reported reductions in the social power and distance of the researcher and empowered young participants to be part of the process.

Neutral Power Relationship: seeking to remove power from the equation, this relationship is equal with no party seeking to exchange or exert power. If power, like Foucault claims, is a force in all relations, then seeking to remove power from the equation is impossible. Elton-Chalcraft (2011) took a power neutral approach trying to 'break down the superior adult/inferior child power status,' by convincing children of her interest in their views and knowledge. However, Elton-Chalcraft uses the term 'break down' supporting the point that power does exist in the researcher: child relationship. Therefore, a stance where neither party seeks to exert influence, and power is not part of the relationship in any form, is arguably unachievable.

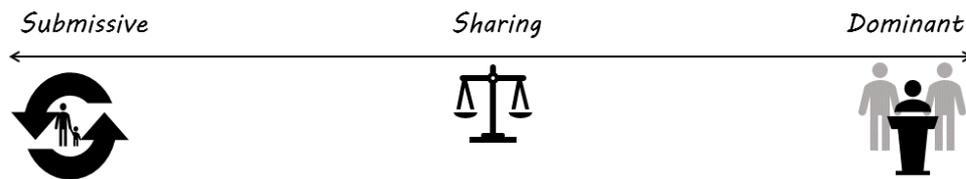
Dominant Power Relationship: a traditional adult-centric approach with the child as object of enquiry and research conducted on, rather than with children. Kellett (2004) observed most adult-led research about children is conducted in schools where 'power is heavily skewed towards adults and... where children are least able to exercise participation rights'. Despite using participative methodologies, Lomax, et al., (2011) recognised their own dominance. Holloway and Biley (2011) reflected that they had chosen the narrative by choosing some comments over others. Indeed, the children in Pinter and Zandian's study (2012) were surprised their own words had been used as parents and teachers would generally correct them.

The child may perceive a dominant relationship even if the researcher does not knowingly project it; a study by Brey and Shutts (2015) found that children aged 3-6 years old could judge social power between two adults via non-verbal cues such as posture, hand position or gaze. Equally, Mayall (2008, in Christensen and James, 2008, pp.121-122) concluded that children recognise their 'own domains in time and space' are structured by adults at home, at school and by social policy. This perception of dominance proved challenging for Swain (2006, p.207) who found himself swaying between dominant and submissive roles: 'simply being an adult meant an unequal, dichotomous distribution of power, and I knew, and they knew, that I was different and apart'.

3.1.3 STANDPOINT AND DELIVER

From this discussion of the sociological perspectives of power, the power relationship that the qualitative researcher could develop when interviewing children is a point on a continuum from dominant to sharing to submissive. This is illustrated in Figure 11: Power Relationships Between Adults and Children below, where either the researcher or the child could take (or be offered) the position as the submissive or dominant party.

Figure 11: Power Relationships Between Adults and Children



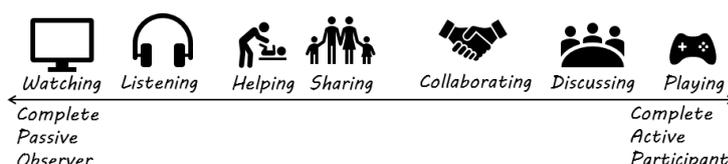
Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

Mandell's least-adult approach (1988) suggests she adopted a submissive position. The researcher adopts the position of acting like another child yielding to other children to make decisions and choose activities. This fully immersive approach to participant observation is one of three types of membership role recommended by Adler and Adler, (1987, pp.33-35). The 'complete member' role values researchers' own 'perspective, experiences, and emotions' as important as the accounts gathered from the participants, therefore turning the implicit bias that is a criticism of qualitative research into an 'unabashed virtue'.

Adler and Adler refer only to ethnography and participant observation under the umbrella term of field research unlike Perecman and Curran (2006) and Bailey (2007) amongst others who include qualitative interviewing, ergo their views on the applicability of these membership roles to other field research activities are unclear.

Adler and Adler's membership roles for field research are arranged in concentric circles according to the researcher's level of immersion in the research setting with 'complete member' or full immersion at its heart. Swain's ethnographic research with children (2006) which included both observation and semi-structured interviewing follow a continuum (Figure 12: Swain's Activities Overlaid on his Participation Framework), covering many forms of participation from the passive (watching, listening), to the more involved (helping, collaborating), and finally to the fully immersed (sharing, discussing, and playing). Swain calls this 'semi-participant observation', but at times, he was fully involved. This is not to discredit Swain's work, but to comment on the challenge of taking a rigid approach to participation in children's research. Indeed, he comments that he took 'multiple positionings' during his study to handle this complexity and confusion. With researchers using multiple methods within one research study, whether that is pure mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) or a mixture of participative methods (qualitative activities), Swain's work suggests it is difficult to take and maintain one stance whilst engaging with young participants. This is supported by Rafferty (2015, p.414) who found herself representing 'multiple social roles to multiple people' in her study of Chinese foster mothers and foster children because of 'hierarchical relations' and 'cultural associations'.

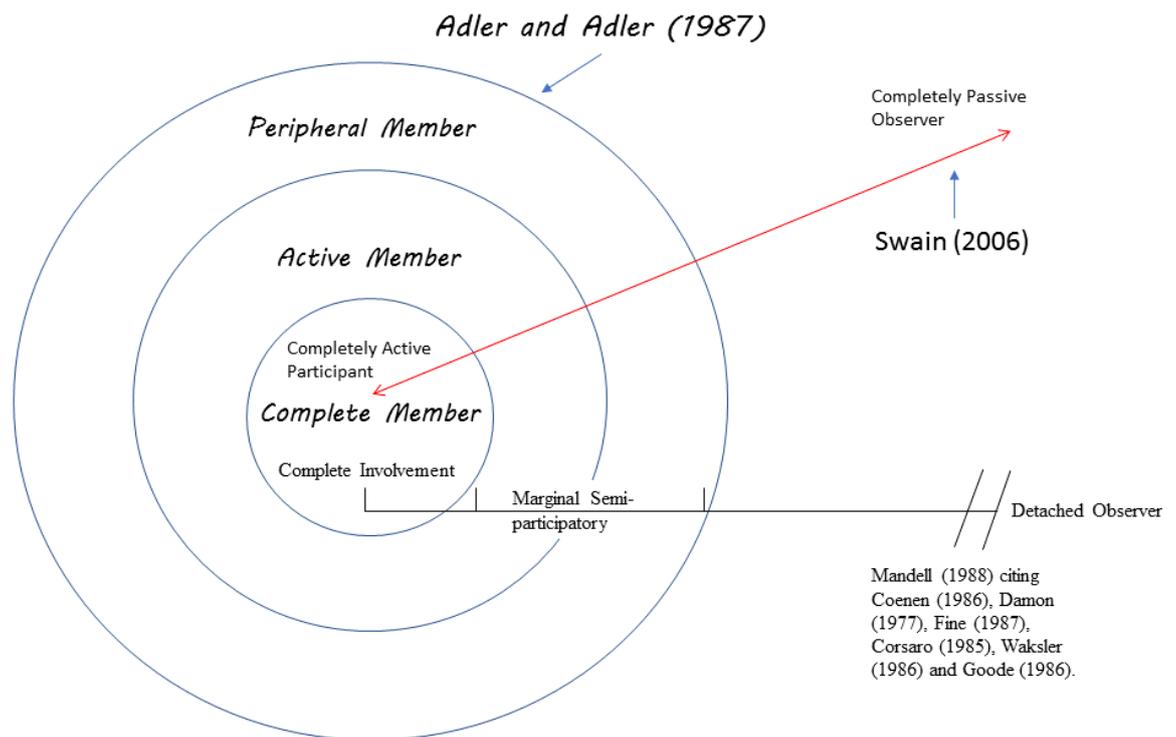
Figure 12: Swain's Activities Overlaid on his Participation Framework



Source: Swain (2006)

Mandell (1988, from Chaput Waksler, 1991, pp.38-59) presents an alternative participation framework that sits between the previous two, with the 'detached observer' referring to Coenen (1986) and Damon (1977); a marginal 'semi-participatory role' from Fine (1987) and Corsaro (1985); and finally, a 'complete involvement role' (Waksler, 1986; Goode, 1986). These roles are based on ontological assumptions about the differences between adults and children in terms of superiority and social, intellectual, cultural, and physical differences.

Figure 13: Three Participation Frameworks of Membership Roles in Field Research



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

Whilst these frameworks (depicted in Figure 13: Three Participation Frameworks of Membership Roles in Field Research) use different terms, the essence is the same, with the researcher choosing from a passive detached role to a fully immersed complete membership role. A stance on the social power between researcher and child may be taken, choosing a position between submissive and dominant, but it is likely the level of researcher participation from passive to fully active may vary during the research encounter, particularly if multiple research methods or tasks are employed. It is therefore suggested that the broad membership roles, such as those defined by Adler and Adler (1987), are too rigid for children's field research and that more definitive roles, such as those ultimately adopted by Mandell (1988) and Swain (2006) provide a more flexible framework for participation acknowledging both the nature of children and their agency.

3.1.3.1 LEAST-ADULT

Mandell's research (1988) has been a significant contributor to the literature around definitive membership roles with her uncompromising 'least-adult' approach to participant observation research. Drawing on Waksler (1986) and Goode (1986), Mandell proposes 'suspending the

ontological terms of child and adult' so that 'all aspects of adult superiority except physical differences can be cast aside' to allow the researcher to enter the children's world through a completely involved membership role. She goes further than Corsaro (1985) who recommends, like Adler and Adler (1987), taking on a peripheral role to engage with children by becoming a fully active participant, closely following the ways of the children, and fixing 'interactional errors' where she made mistakes in her childlike behaviour.

This 'least-adult' approach involved rejecting ordinary forms of adult-like behaviour such as 'authority, verbal competency, cognitive and social mastery' as well as not directing children's behaviour or play or disciplining them. Mandell claims success in following the children's ways, minimising (although not removing) the physical differences, playing with the children and sharing social objects. It appears the young children were not wholly convinced, repeatedly asking 'who are you?' to establish her role in the classroom and asking for help with adult tasks like tying shoelaces. She states it required repeated 'behavioural demonstration' to explain the character of the least-adult role to the children.

Indeed, challenges to the role included teachers repeatedly asking or anticipating help with the children, Mandell misunderstanding the children's speech patterns, and asking them to repeat themselves (correcting), the children stretching rules (urinating in the playground in her presence) and failing to stop a boy wounding another child with a shovel despite a teacher asking her to intervene.

The 'least-adult' role is not without its critics. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) and Elton-Chalcraft (2011) question the necessity of assuming this role while Bartholomew and O'Donohoe (2003, p.434) suggest it is enough to 'look through the eyes of a child rather than the lens of an adult researcher' to adapt communication and language that aligns with children's conversational norms. In fact, Mandell's research took place between 1976-1979, more than a decade before publication, in a similar time frame to Foucault, and prior to the literature on the new sociology of childhood. Children who are digital natives today are more sophisticated in their outlook on life and are developing faster as independent consumers with their own views. They have been educated to question adults' motives and words like 'paedophile' are common vernacular for primary school children. It is no wonder that children in more recent studies question this complete participant role.

Equally, it is challenging to fully implement this methodology in today's risk adverse, litigious society. With stringent ethical processes and risk assessments, it is unlikely an approach that involves sitting back and letting children behave how they wish without intervention, i.e., urinating in public or injuring another child would be acceptable. Despite criticisms, the 'least-adult' approach offers useful insight into how the adult researcher can enter the children's world; certainly, many researchers have since used diluted versions, such as 'interested idiot' (Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, 2005).

Mandell's 'least-adult' approach allowed her to adopt a reasonably submissive power stance but to switch between passive and active participation, from watching and listening to playing as necessary, whereas Swain's predominantly 'least-teacher' approach allowed him to take a dominant role with the flexibility to switch between observation and active participation.

3.1.3.2 ALTERNATIVE STANDPOINTS

Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005) coined the aforementioned 'interested idiot' standpoint with researchers moving from an 'adultist' orientation to place power with participants and asking them to transfer knowledge to the researchers i.e., an adult who had forgotten how to play.

Gillies and Robinson (2010) established themselves as 'teacher-like' figures in their study of UK secondary school pupils at risk of exclusion, building positive relationships 'on [the children's] terms', whilst still implementing structure and rules for acceptable behaviour. Conversely, Hill, Laybourn and Borland (1996) found the role of 'teacher' pressed upon them and Fargas-Malet, et al., (2010) found if children 'perceive' research to be schoolwork, they might assign the researcher the role of teacher. These experiences relate to Foucault's system of relations with pre-existing forms of power within the institution affecting perception of the researchers' role.

Conducting research in-home brings challenges, Yee and Andrews (2006) who wore their university identification badges, were aware of how they presented themselves as educational researchers, ex-teachers and parents, as well as the 'identities attributed' to them by the participants, feeling torn between their professional demands and 'social obligations of a good guest'.

Similarly, Mayall (2008, from Christensen and James, 2008, pp.115-119), found the social position of the researcher visiting the family home needed to be negotiated between the conditions offered by the adult and the child. Although familiar objects and rooms provided stimulus for young children, the benefits had to be carefully managed alongside generational issues, adult rights, and power within the home.

A longitudinal study of tribal communities (Allen, Mohatt, et al., 2012) revealed the complex relationship between the researcher, village elders and children, the village's 'most precious element'. The tribal elders expected the researcher to be a steward of their words in an oral culture and not to later destroy them as specified by data protection legislation. Cultural factors, time and research design clearly impact on the role that the researcher can take in international ethnographic studies.

Elton-Chalcraft (2011) partially adopted the 'least-adult' approach but felt full adoption would be ridiculed by her participants. She broke down the 'superior adult/inferior child power status' by sitting with the children, lining up outside and not reprimanding the children in the playground. Although the children addressed her as 'Miss', Elton-Chalcraft saw her role as different to that of a teacher referring to Kvale's metaphor (1996, pp.3-4) of the interviewer as a traveller 'on a journey that leads to a tale to be told'. The children were invited to tell the researcher their stories 'affording the child more ownership of the project.'

Swain (2006) struggled to align with one positioning, switching between multiple standpoints from adult, researcher, teacher, friend, pupil to peer. He tried to spend most of his time in a 'least-teacher' role whilst aiming to 'maintain the upper hand' commenting that like Epstein (1998, from Swain, 2006) the children did not 'possess the experience or the framework for understanding' who he was or what he represented, perhaps unsurprising when the researcher himself lacked confidence in his stance and repeatedly adjusted the power

relationship as he switched between observation and interviewing. Additional demographic standpoints may also influence the role projected by the researcher or perceived by the children, such as parent (Elton-Chalcraft, 2011; Yee and Andrews, 2006; Mandell, 1988) and indeed their gender or feminist stance (Swain, 2006; Elton-Chalcraft, 2011).

Taking no role may be possible when the researcher detaches from the child in observational research (Chaput Waksler, 1991) and when the researcher devolves responsibility for the fieldwork to the children with peer-to-peer research or participatory tasks (Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, 2005; Lomax, 2012).

Butterworth and Murfin (1999) sought to take 'no role' when studying children's play patterns in a pre-school but found it 'increasingly difficult... to remain uninvolved' due to the children's 'natural curiosity and attention-seeking behaviours' around a video camera. Care had to be taken to 'counter role confusion' between 'the researcher as non-participant recorder and the researcher as participant friendly interviewer'. Although researchers' participation levels may need to vary during the research encounter with young children, adopting an appropriate definitive role will allow for that manoeuvrability whilst eliminating role confusion.

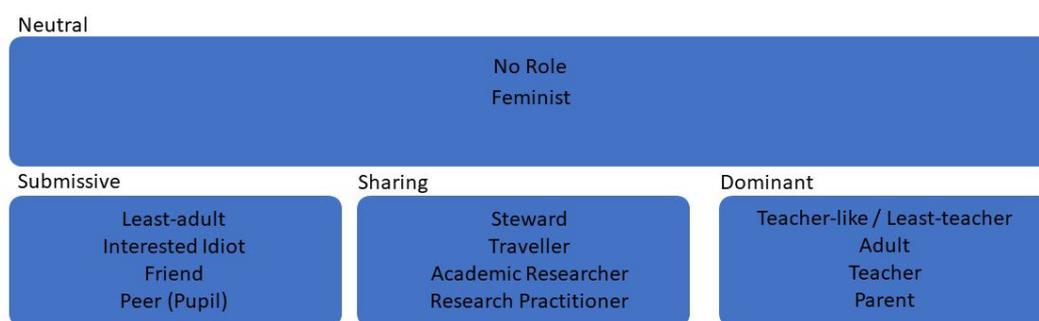
3.1.3.3 THE FINAL STAND

This review has identified several different positions that the researcher could take in a qualitative research interview with a child to manage the power balance between the two parties, considering either a submissive, sharing, or dominant approach. This is presented in the conceptual framework below (Figure 14: Conceptual Framework: The Researcher's Role in Children's Qualitative Research). These include teacher, teacher-like or least-teacher, parent, and adult, all of which could be viewed as more dominant approaches. Least-teacher could be interpreted as 'teaching assistant', a common role in England as most primary school classes would be supported by at least one unqualified (but very able) support assistant.

Steward, traveller, academic researcher and research practitioner all appear to be sharing roles where both parties are actively involved and linked in the output of stories or research findings. The two distinctions between researchers are made here to account for the studies conducted by academics and those researchers who also work in the field e.g., nurses, teachers, businesspeople.

Least-adult, interested idiot, friend and peer are more submissive standpoints, where the researcher may yield to the young participants, and finally, neutral roles like 'no role' or feminist which might not be as relevant to children's research but could be of use in transformative paradigms (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.9). Gender was also identified as a standpoint, but could be represented by 'Adult', unless there was a particular research objective or reason for a gendered approach.

Figure 14: Conceptual Framework: The Researcher's Role in Children's Qualitative Research



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

The selection of the role is down to the researcher's own views of children and the research objectives; however, this illustration provides a starting point or toolkit for marketing researchers to think about how they use power in the qualitative research encounter and relates to RQ4 and the best way to construct children's research designs. As stated at the beginning of this sub-chapter, no research has considered specifically how successfully the researcher's projection of a role is interpreted by the participating children. This will be investigated through the addition of questioning about the role of the researcher in the first qualitative interview with the sampled children in this digital branding study, to establish a conceptual framework or researcher's toolkit through empirical research. The methodology for this aspect of the research is covered in Chapter 3.4.2.5.

3.2 CHILDREN'S RESEARCH OR CHILD'S PLAY?

The reconceptualization of children in childhood studies in the 1990s (as discussed in Chapter 2.1) has repositioned children as 'subjects' rather than 'objects' of interest (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008, pp.34-35; Christensen and James, 2017, p.1). Research is now conducted 'with' rather than 'on' children (Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010; Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, 2005; Mayall, 2000; O'Kane, 2000; Thomas, 2017). Before, children were considered 'incompetent and developing becoming-adults' (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, p.500) and research to test and assess children's capabilities often took place in laboratories, particularly in the fields of child development and psychology.

With children repositioned as 'beings' (Qvortrup, 1994, pp.4-5; Lee, 2001, pp.36-37; James and Prout, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.207), research data with children has more status and is not played down because of children's developing levels of literacy, understanding and skills or its subject matter (see earlier comments relating to women's work in Chapter 2.1.2).

Certainly, Pinter and Zandian (2014, p.66) commented that children can provide 'useful and reliable insights into their own lives' and can be both 'resourceful and knowledgeable'. This perspective recognises that children are not just a mini adult with reduced capacity but are capable of a point of view about their own life and their position within the social and commercial world.

This change in attitude towards children has resulted in a shift in methodologies employed in research studies, particularly with the use of 'child-friendly' methods using practical and creative activities such as drama, art, video, and storytelling, rather than the filling in of surveys (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). A key research question for this study (RQ4) is to examine

the best way to explore children's own views and potentially changing and more agentic behaviours to answer the main study objectives. This sub-chapter will therefore guide the methodology for the study by examining the new wave of research methodologies and how they facilitate research with children to understand their views in 'natural and meaningful ways' (Pinter and Zandian, 2012, p.2).

3.2.1 CHILDREN'S POSITIONS IN RESEARCH

A child who is an 'object' will not speak for themselves; research data will be collected via their parent, guardian, teacher, or responsible adult. The choice of research methods will recognise the need to protect children as 'incompetent or vulnerable beings' (Christensen and Prout, 2002, p.480) with children removed from the consent, research design or fieldwork processes.

Child as 'subject' takes a more 'child-centred' approach with their involvement tempered by judgements made about their cognitive and social competencies, and children included or excluded in the fieldwork because of their age or perceived (dis)abilities.

Christensen and Prout (2002, p.481) identify a third position as child as 'subject and social actor' recognising that children are 'seen to act, take part in, change and become changed by the social and cultural world they live in'. In this case, they suggest that the selection of research methods should be the same as with any research study with adults; the methods should be suitable for the target audience, the 'social and cultural context' and the research questions (Christensen and James, 2017, p.4).

The final position for children in research studies is that of the child as an 'active participant' moving further to consider not only that research should take place 'with' children but to make children participants in the research process, and in some cases, to make them the actual researcher (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Thomas, 2017; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008, pp.34-35). This is also known as 'co-production' (Christensen and Prout, 2002, p.481) and in the market research industry as 'co-creation' where different parties are brought together to 'jointly produce a mutually valued outcome' (MRS, 2017; Therkelsen, 2010).

Are these two additional positions really that different to 'child as subject'? They all appear to be child-centred, with research methods chosen to suit the target audience. Christensen and Prout (2002) are keen to acknowledge the social agency of children, but this does not appear to be that different in nature to 'child as subject'. The literature around 'active participation' suggests that children can become much more active in research studies, even taking the lead in research activities. This is a significant step change for researchers who would previously ask parents to answer questions on behalf of their children without consultation. Whether this is indeed a third or even fourth position can be debated, but it certainly demonstrates a stronger commitment to the idea of the 'child as subject' with a greater level of engagement in the research process.

The idea of making children 'active participants' in the research process has gathered pace in recent years, particularly in professional practice (MRS, 2016). Thomas (2017, p.161) breaks down the category of 'active participant' even further. He distinguishes between 'active research participants' as children who choose 'how they participate' and help to 'shape the questions and findings', then 'children as researchers', breaking this down into three further subcategories: children as research assistants (carrying out interviews or gathering data); children as research partners (share setting objectives, choosing methods, data collection,

analysis and dissemination); and children as research leaders (choosing the project and leading the activities, with or without help from adults).

Christensen and Prout (2002, p.480) suggest that these four perspectives 'co-exist' and can be used alongside each other but appear to criticise research that mixes orientations without considering the ethical implications of the newer approaches (child as 'subject and social actor' and child as 'active participant'). It is not clear whether they believe child as 'subject' and child as 'subject and social actor' can be taken simultaneously but they fail to argue whether the distinction between these two positions really exists; again, are these not one and the same thing? A research study that is child-centred, using creative or arts-based tasks in friendship pairs rather than a formal focus group discussion, considers the child to be a 'subject' recognising their cognitive and social competencies at that age/stage, but it is also arguably the best methodology for the research project in hand to encourage the children to reveal more about their social world.

Punch (2002b) identified three different approaches to research with children: where they are viewed as practically the same as adults and the same research methods are used; where they are completely different to adults and ethnography is used to examine the child's world; and where they are seen as similar to adults but with different competencies. This final approach is the area where participatory research methods have developed which appeal to children's innate desire to play, acknowledge the level of their skills development, and enable them to be involved in the collection and analysis of the data about their own lives, often making choices about the data collection methods they want to use. Punch's approach could be consolidating these positions of 'child as subject', 'child as subject and social actor' and 'child as active participant' by embracing children's sameness and their differences to adults.

Holland, et al., (2010) identified studies that were called participative but were entirely researcher-led, but equally and in line with Punch (2002b), saw overlap in the positions taken in real participative research with children. This included research that used child-centred methodologies, studies that encouraged children to input to the design, analysis, or dissemination of the results, and finally those that trained children to conduct research often in topics of their choice.

A continuum using an almost identical pattern was later proposed by Pinter and Zandian (2014) with wholly child-centred research projects involving questions developed by the children, to adult-initiated projects that involve children in shaping the project and offering different ways to contribute to it, to the other end of the scale where the project is entirely adult-led.

3.2.2 THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

The literature around children's participation in research is extensive in relation to social inclusion, decision-making, and the rights agenda. This includes models of citizen participation such as Arnstein's ladder (1969) and subsequent variations (Hart, 1992; Franklin, 1997; Treseder, 1997), as cited by Thomas (2007). These theories relate to children's right to be included in decision-making about their social worlds, rather than participative techniques which can be used in research studies, in this case for market research purposes rather than social research.

Participation in market research is an on-going concern with response rates continuing to fall, particularly with nationally representative cohort studies, polls, and public-sector surveys (Mouncey, 2016). Engagement is crucial to participation; adults have other means of communicating with brands through social media and communities which they may prefer to research studies, but younger children should not have a social media presence of their own even though many do (see Chapter 2.2.4 for more discussion on this contentious issue) and are likely to be actively discouraged to engage with anyone online who is not their 'friend in real life'. It is clear why participative methods, often seen as fun and exciting, have been particularly attractive to research and communications agencies who are struggling to recruit or achieve adequate samples. From an academic and sociological perspective, participative research offers a way to develop a 'social contract' or 'partnership' between the adult researchers and young participants that enables different perspectives to be collected and 'honours and values' the voices of the children studied (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell, 2015, pp.21-22).

3.2.2.1 POWER AND PARTICIPATION

Participation can therefore be achieved by using engaging child-centred methods, or by including children in the research process. As previously stated, Christensen and Prout (2002, p.480) warned that these newer approaches can have 'ethical implications', for example, if you consider that a child is a social actor, then it is reasonable to ask them about their own social and cultural world which will involve siblings and parents but gathering information about third parties is contrary to Rule 22 of the MRS Code of Conduct (MRS, 2019). Additionally, asking children to act as researchers could have ethical implications in relation to data protection (anonymity) and data collection (methods fit for purpose, bias, participants can express their opinion as they wish). Awarding children power in the research process could therefore lead to research that is less ethically robust unless measures are put into place to counter these issues.

Participatory research methods have been embraced because they 'empower' the child, but this is criticised by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p.503) who say this suggests that without help from participatory methodologies constructed by the adult researcher, children cannot exercise their agency, a Catch-22 scenario which perpetuates the power that adult researchers hold over children in managing the research encounter.

As discussed in Chapter 3.1, the role of the researcher in children's research reflects both the researcher's view of the position of the child and the child's perception of that role, but equally the level of participant involvement in the study. For example, in the conceptualisation of power proposed in that chapter, a sharing power relationship empowers the child to act as a co-researcher or to have an input into the methodologies used; a submissive power relationship sees the child take control; and a dominant power relationship sees a fully adult centric approach with child as 'object'. The role to take should depend on the research objectives, the methodologies to be used and the researcher's own views of the difference between the adult and the child.

Participatory research can offer a way to rebalance power and reduce distance between the researcher and the child (Punch, 2002a; Pinter, Kuchah and Smith, 2013; Mahon, et al., 1996; Kuchah and Pinter, 2012). Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell, (2015, p.33) warn that researchers should be aware of their relationship to 'power and authority' but equally that

children can be seen to exercise power themselves during research encounters through the way they 'adopt, change or redirect the tasks in which they are engaged' (Idem, p.60). In fact, Wyness (2012, p.430) felt adults had been lost in the research process and should be brought back as 'partners, collaborators and actors' within a 'framework of intergenerational dialogue'. Each party has an important role to play in the generation of participative data.

3.2.2.2 PARTICIPATIVE APPROACHES

Child-led research in the field of social and academic research shares a close connection to the current system of pedagogy sharing a common framework of active participation. In England, young children within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are expected to learn and develop through a carefully balanced mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity with practitioners expected to make an 'ongoing judgement' about the optimum balance (Department of Education, 2014). Activities become more adult-led as children reach formal learning in Year 1. Yet, children have little experience of formal tests until their SATS in Year 2. Current teaching practice in England therefore aligns well with research practices where children are an active component of the research process, particularly as many projects take place in the school environment.

There are limitations to the child-centred approach which have been identified by theorists. James (1993 cited in Harden, et al., 2000) criticised the purely child-centred approach as it 'ignores the issue that autonomous play is bounded by adult control'; again, demonstrating the potential power play between the child and the researcher, later reinforced by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p.503) who identified this as a Catch-22 scenario.

Researchers may also lack the ability to oversee groups of children engaging in more creative research exercises. Pinter and Zandian (2014) noted that children can divert the process, whilst Butterworth and Murfin (1999) found that their pilot study was thwarted by the curiosity of a class of 4-year-old pre-schoolers who remained aware and intensely preoccupied by their video camera.

Research that takes place in a school environment will equally be bounded by its behaviour codes and the limitations of what can safely and ethically be achieved i.e., impromptu outings beyond the school gates would not be feasible. Nairn and Clarke (2012) and Lomax (2012) discuss the social dynamics of research that is more child-led; children as interviewers can cause upset by leaving out certain children, creating bias by only involving their friendship groups, collecting inadequate data, or displaying different behaviours in front of a video camera. Finally, most child-centred participative approaches focus on arts and play-based techniques which may not suit all participants (Carter and Ford, 2013; Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry, 2011, p.73). Not every child can or wants to draw and colour in and this may lead to children struggling with the methods on offer, becoming bored or disruptive – again, bringing power into play (Gillies and Robinson, 2010).

Even if research is more child-led, Woodhead and Faulkner (2008, p.35) caution against researchers who reject the idea of the child as subject or object, for that of social actor or active participant, without considering that children are 'becomings at the same time as beings'. This feels like a reintroduction of the ontological dilemma of 'beings' over 'becomings' but what Woodhead and Faulkner mean here is that children are still different from adults, and it is adults who hold the responsibility for the research methodologies employed. Researchers

should therefore 'guide [children's] behaviour and enable their social participation in ways consistent with their understanding, interests and ways of communicating' (Ibid).

This point is supported by Thomas (2017, p.165), Mahon, et al., (1996), and Hill, et al., (2004, p.88) who stressed that researchers should focus on the skills and knowledge children specifically have over adults and how their age-based competences can be nurtured in a research study. Even young children, according to Clark (2004, p.153), can be given new tools to communicate using participative approaches without the need to 'simplify' the approach. For Stoecklin (2012), the real benefit of participative child-friendly methodologies is that they are conducive to understanding how children make sense of everyday life, proving also perhaps that the research position can treat child as 'subject' and 'subject and social actor' simultaneously if we return to Christensen and Prout's definitions (2002).

It is a challenge for researchers to enact the step-change to making children active participants in the research process and calls for greater consideration of the most appropriate research design, processes, and ethical procedures. Lomax, et al., (2011) called their experience of allowing children to choose the topic, method, and genre of their visual output 'discomfiting' with them feeling 'perpetually anxious'. It appears however that the return on investment can be invaluable. In their study of children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, they were struck by how the older children proactively tried to involve the younger children in the project recognising their needs and competencies. Pinter and Zandian (2014) also demonstrated the benefits of children as active participants or even co-researchers as they know their own life, can shape the research activities, select appropriate topics, and even ask unexpected questions or make spontaneous comments that can bring rich insight to the research problem. In fact, Banister and Booth (2005) revealed that the most successful method in their research was when they handed children the most responsibility in a photography exercise: 'we demonstrated our trust in the participants and they rewarded us by taking the task seriously. The photographs allowed us a huge insight into the lives of the children'.

3.2.3 PARTICIPATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

The range of tools and techniques that can be employed within participative research is constantly evolving due to technological developments but includes, to name a few: drawing, photography, model making, scrapbooks, collage, feelings boards, graffiti boards, Lego modelling, video, mapping, diaries, drama, music, storytelling, painting, cartoons, timelines, unfinished stories, sentence completion, props, and vignettes. Punch (2002b) proposed that the choice of methods is dependent on not only the age, competence, experience, preference, and social status of the child in question, but the cultural and physical environment, the research objectives and the researcher's competence. Indeed, it could be added, that the choice of methods is only bounded by the limits of the researcher's imagination and creativity.

3.2.3.1 TALK AND TASK-CENTRED ACTIVITIES

Harden, et al., (2000) discovered that task-centred activities can help children to express their ideas and opinions more easily than if they participate in talk-focused activities which would include interviews and surveys. They found these activities useful for the researcher to establish their role with the child through building rapport and making the children feel relaxed about the process. Their task-based activities, such as drawing, provided stimulus for discussion and avoided the researcher interpreting pictures incorrectly i.e., not as the child

intended. Certainly, Driessnack (2005, cited by Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010) agreed that focus has shifted from what children draw to what they say about their drawings, and Hunleth (2011) called for 'systematic inquiry' into the process of drawing, the context, and the 'co-construction of dialogue around the drawings'. Horgan (2017) also advocated the use of 'on-task chatter' to collect data during interactive floor activities which had the additional benefit of deflecting the 'glare of researcher and peer attention'.

Like drawing, photography appears to be a method that works most effectively when children provide the meaning for the image. A technique called Photovoice which was developed by Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, (2005) involves children taking their own photographs and writing down what they mean. The researcher can then use these as stimulus for discussion. Robson (2011, p.189) found video making was an effective tool as 'young children are practised consumers and interpreters of the semiotics of television' with expertise in the selection of images and filming techniques like zooming and panning. However, Pimlott-Wilson (2012) and Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, and Bottrell (2015, p.1-5) claim that these approaches are only effective when combined with dialogue between the interviewer and participant to understand what the child was aiming to achieve with their creative work.

Health research is traditionally an area that focused on children as 'objects' but a project conducted by Carter and Ford (2013) used a range of arts-based approaches with children. They found allowing children to choose from these activities gave them the 'opportunity to create their own artistic output, to facilitate the child's engagement, communication, control, and interpretation of their own experiences'. They discovered the benefit of props in helping children explain their perspective, but some materials were limiting e.g., when tasked with modelling a new health clinic, Lego made 'angular walls but modelling clay can create soft curves'. The choice of materials made available to the participants could bias the findings and would lead to a fundamentally different conclusion in the analysis.

Play-based techniques such as modelling with Lego can be an effective way to get children to discuss places and social interactions. Pimlott-Wilson (2012) used Lego Duplo followed by a qualitative interview to gain insight into the roles of individuals within the home from a child's perspective. This method was found to reduce reliance on children's artistic capabilities and allowed children to discuss their cultural experiences and the roles of different members of their family. Some disadvantages were identified: children may consider the Lego range used is not for their gender or age group; they may move from depicting reality to imaginative play and the researcher must carefully manage the process; they may prefer to create the model depicted on the box; and finally, the materials may limit what they want to create i.e., the figures do not correspond with their family's characteristics or make-up.

These visual and task-based methods can be useful when researching young children and those with cognitive or communication difficulties, according to Horgan (2017), particularly the use of pictures to support vignettes, 'talking mats' (pictures used as stimulus material such as a house or map), visual timetables, and photographs.

For talk-based methods, surveys can be created in child-friendly formats and interview practice adjusted to suit young children, but these methods appear to be less popular with researchers adopting participative techniques (Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010; Scott, 2008). Interestingly, popular surveying tool Survey Monkey launched new slider and star rating questions in October 2016 that are designed to be fun and engaging for participants (Larue,

2016) and CAPI (computer aided personal interviewing) offers more interaction with video and audio stimuli (Hill, 1997).

In practice, surveys are required by marketers to understand in a structured and standardised way what children think and feel about a brand. They can collect measurable data for conclusive research designs and are therefore important, if not more difficult to design. Market research surveys are often directed via research panels to parents asking questions about their children, or parents are asked to complete questions alongside their child giving permission for them to participate. This limits the agency of the child and their ability to express their own views.

Interviewer-led data collection methods allow more interaction and the chance to explain questions and use visual materials, but this can be an expensive method. With the growth of online surveys and community panels, the market research world requires more than an emoticon as an anchor label to improve the effectiveness of structured surveying with children but the opportunity to use more engaging surveying tools on smartphones and tablets is clear and participative techniques can be introduced at pilot phases or through initial qualitative work to increase children's participation.

Focus group interviews appear to offer ways of engaging children as active participants even when they are not assigned the interviewer role. In Kuchah and Pinter's study of educational standards in Cameroon (2012), children were able to construct a consensus view, take control of the agenda, and challenge adult views of what constitutes a good teacher and good teaching.

Offering children choices of methods is recommended as a way of increasing children's agency and addressing the differing cognitive and communication needs of a range of children (Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry, 2011, p.73). Punch (2002b) suggests that a range of methods and techniques is the best way to address a 'diversity of childhoods', children's 'varied social competencies', and differences such as 'class, age, gender, disability, ethnicity or culture'. This approach is supported by Clark's multi-method Mosaic model (2004) where a range of methodologies were used with the children, including observation, child conferencing, photography, tours, map making and interviews to account for the 'verbal and non-verbal ways' with which young children communicate.

Lomax (2011) adopted child-led visual methods to explore children's geographies in a poor area. A variety of methods were employed such as video, photography, walking tours, mapping, drawing and collage as they were less reliant on verbal competencies. The combination of research methods showed the 'diverse ways that the children responded to the research', and offered, 'alternative insights into children's experiences'.

Task-centred and child-led visual, arts and play-based techniques are proven to work well providing the results are used as stimulus material for further discussion. Market researchers have become used to off-the-shelf surveying tools that offer limited creativity or interaction with participants and are not particularly suitable to young audiences but even the mainstream tools are starting to offer more functionality. Engaging with children in advance of a survey to help shape the research questions, providing a menu of topics to select questions from, or incorporating the technology we see every day in apps to give children more creative ways to respond to our questioning such as drawing and modelling buildings (e.g., Minecraft) would allow us to truly engage with children on their level, delivering insight that mines far deeper

than a dry percentage. Market researchers need more structured methods than social researchers, but we can gather more effective data by learning from the best elements of these participatory child-led techniques.

3.2.4 CHILD'S PLAY?

To understand children's own views and their agentic behaviours in relation to digital device use and engagement with brands online, should traditional research methods therefore be eschewed for these newer participative techniques, perhaps even handing over the recording devices to children as they take charge of the research project as an active participant and co-researcher?

Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) warn against 'uncritically' adopting participatory approaches with Holland, et al., (2010, p.373), Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2011), and Hunleth (2011) cautioning against the received view that these approaches produce 'better research data' or that they replace the need for a theoretical framework. There are of course ethical concerns, and power may interplay between the researcher and children, and even between children, in different surprising ways. As Hunleth (2011, p.84) says, these methods are not 'fool proof'.

These methods should not even be thought of as exclusively belonging to children. Punch (2002b) argued that they should be thought of as 'person-friendly' techniques rather than child-friendly. She suggests striking a balance between recognising children's competencies and facilitating their means to communicate without patronising them as participative methods do not mean they are 'incapable of engaging with the methods' used in adult research studies. Equally, Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2011, p.73) challenge the assumption that all children like to 'draw, paint or play' and suggest that some children prefer 'adult friendly' methods like structured interviews over participative task-based activities.

Participative techniques and active participation can be tools that recognise children's agency but must be used with caution, to avoid ethical dilemmas and power play. These techniques can be talk or task based but there must be a clear rationale for their use and children must be involved with the analysis of the data in relation to visual outputs such as drawings and photographs. Surveys can be used in a participative manner if children are involved in the design or content of the questions and the presentation is adjusted to suit children's levels of literacy and competence.

It appears that these participative methodological approaches offer the opportunity to engage children as a subject and more active participant with fun and interesting activities that boost their ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings about their social world. This is tempered by the need to balance power and address the Catch 22 issue of adults setting the agenda and activities in the research encounter. Assumptions should not be made about children's level of interest or skill in activities that are perceived by adults to be child-friendly, or of specific gendered appeal. It is clear from the literature that any participative techniques aimed at children should be used within a theoretical framework as part of a research design that considers these issues, alongside the research objectives, research context, and the social, communicative, and cognitive capabilities of the children participating. Market researchers should not just get caught up in the method, for method's sake.

3.3 ETHICAL RESEARCH WITH THE AGENTIC CHILD

Ethics is the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles and when related to research, 'refers to the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it', (Saunders, et al., 1997, p.109). These moral principles are a branch of philosophy that guide thinking over what is good for individuals and society as a whole; in fact, the first consideration of any research project should be: does this project have a benefit to society?

This research project explores issues relating to children's activities in the digital environment and whether they are navigating those environments independently (RQ8) and safely with an awareness of the commercial nature of those interactions (RQ9). The research therefore moves beyond simply examining children for their commercial value to acknowledging their societal value, their agency, and the need to protect them ethically in the research process. In fact, as discussed in section 2.2.5, Chitakunye (2012) stressed the importance of researching children's consumption practices using their own perspective (their authentic voices from active participants) and so RQ4 embeds moral principles by asking 'what is the best way to explore children's own views and potentially changing and more agentic behaviours...?'

The purpose of this sub-chapter is to review the most appropriate ways to gather ethical data from the agentic child, on their digital behaviour and personal brand relationships, to direct the research methodology for this study. It will address issues relating to children's rights and the challenge of treating children as a research subject rather than an object; this is, in reality, the dichotomy between acknowledging children's full agency and hearing their voice, and accepting the constraints and limitations placed upon the child, and the researcher who must adopt the role of 'responsible adult' (MRS, 2019, p.13) adhering to legislation and ethical principles.

Moral decisions about research procedures ensure researchers' conduct is appropriate and that behaviours which might be acceptable and appropriate (or not) in that context are reviewed. These moral decisions encompass all aspects of the research process from: sampling and recruitment; informed consent and its withdrawal; incentivising respondents; conducting research face to face or on sensitive issues; using appropriate data collection tools; recording interviews; keeping records secure; maintaining anonymity; procedures for analysis and storage of the data, to safeguarding children's rights and wellbeing.

In the UK, legislation relating to children's research focuses on the use or storage of personal data (The Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2019; The Data Protection Act 2018, the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation) or the use of free incentives and prize draws (Gambling Act 2005). This study was subject to approval by the university's research ethics committee adhering to ethical principles and current legislation, but it is important to note, that as a member of the Market Research Society, the researcher was also bound to follow the Code of Conduct and regulations which guide professional activities of market researchers to maintain professional standards (MRS, 2019, p.4).

3.3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S ETHICAL RIGHTS

In the 5th century BC, Protagoras argued that 'man is the measure of all things' (Levene, 2013, p.29); namely, if a belief is subjective and relative, something will only be considered as ethical or right, 'because a person or society judges it to be so' (Buckingham, et al., 2011, p.43). Setting standards and determining whether an action is good or bad, and whether an approach is right or wrong, has been considered over time within normative ethics, a branch of moral philosophy (Balfour, 2016, pp.67–86).

Ethical responsibilities, obligations and duties relate to people's 'right to something' and the acknowledgement that 'they have an ethical claim to that thing' (Fryer, 2015, p.2). Although it might be surmised in our society that all human beings have automatic rights, Liao (2010, pp.159-165) claims this is 'surprisingly difficult to defend' as a 'relevant empirical attribute' would need to apply to all humans for them to be considered right holders, however the 'most plausible attributes such as actual sentience and actual agency' do not apply to the very young, infirm or severely disabled. Both Arendt (1998, pp.88-100) and Alderson (2008, p.130) assert that human rights are fundamental rights with Alderson (Ibid) arguing that young children share many 'inalienable human rights' with adults, therefore these should be considered as 'human' as opposed to 'adult' rights.

The evolution of the agentic child aligns with the development of ethical rights, which historically were slow to emerge. Early forms of legislation considered children as 'agents for the devolution of property' (Eekelaar, 1986, pp.163-167) with no legal duty ascribed to the interests of children without land or future entailment. The poor laws of the sixteenth century decreed that a father must educate his children or see them indentured into an apprenticeship. This was not in the interests of the child, but as a form of social control and to reduce claims on parish funds (Eekelaar, 1986, p.166; Cowman, 2014, p.2).

The protection of society's rights over that of children continued throughout most of the nineteenth century. Early schools and Sunday schools focused on improving the morals and manners of the poor (Digby and Searby, 1981, p.24). Schooling by the time of the Factory Act (1833), was considered a means of social control (Idem, pp.25-27) with a focus on instilling 'conformist values' over 'independent thought'. Foucault (1977, p.172) describes how the school master or mistress would oversee the school from their chair to 'give life and motion to the whole' which gives a sense of the perpetual monitoring of the pupils and their limited agency. In fact, the only recognition of children's agency within this regimented approach was when they were engaged as 'monitors' to oversee other children (Oswell, 2013, p.119).

Although legislation in the nineteenth century began to take note of children's welfare (Eekelaar, 1986, p.168; Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act 1889), this was still secondary to the protection of the social system. The origin of childhood is discussed in Chapter 2.1 but Jenks (1996, pp.70-73) provides some contextualisation for the development of children's rights through his discussion of the 'Dionysian' child, whose 'wilful' behaviour could only be controlled through harsh, physical 'moral guidance' to protect 'adult collectivity'.

Finally, in the twentieth century, legislation (Children and Young Persons Act 1969; Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984; Children Act 1989) put children's welfare first, over the rights of their parents, by granting them 'liberty rights' (Oswell, 2013, p.237). A pivotal

legal case in English law, Gillick versus Wisbech and Norfolk Area Health Authority 1985 (NSPCC, 2018), resulted in the Gillick Competency and Fraser Guidelines to assess the maturity of a child to make decisions (in the context of medical treatment). Lord Scarman commented that 'parental right yields to the child's right to make his own decisions when he reaches a sufficient understanding and intelligence to be capable of making up his own mind.' This set an important precedent, enabling the child to make decisions on medical treatment without parental agreement, if the child was judged to be of 'sufficient' mind. However, in the context of medical, market and social research today, decision-making is still one-sided, and the parent's consent trumps the child's; the child can refuse to participate in research even if the responsible adult has granted permission, but if the adult has refused permission, the child cannot take part.

Explicit legal acknowledgment of children's right to have rights came through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC) becoming the most ratified international human rights treaty in history (United Nations, 2014). The case for children's rights suggests that children are vulnerable, 'requiring protection' (Hendrick, 1997, p.51) but that their right to autonomous decision-making is dependent on 'their competency and capacity to speak and to reason' which Oswell (2013, p.259) claims is shaped both by their learning and development at school and their position in the digital world. This is not an inclusive definition and children who may not meet the standard definitions of competency and capacity would be awarded less agency e.g., an autistic child with selective mutism.

Children, both disabled and non-disabled, neurodivergent and neurotypical, are certainly flexing their digital footprint; they demonstrate their advanced technical competencies and capacity to use devices without parental involvement or support. It took two hundred years for society to turn full circle from protecting the social order from children, to putting children's welfare at its heart, and children have only had international legal rights for 30 years, an equivalent time period to a generational cohort. Their rights, however, are very much constrained by adults who determine what is appropriate and judge what the child must be protected against. Children are judged on 'their competency and capacity to speak and to reason' (Hendrick, 1997, p.51) which is not inclusive, and informed consent is ultimately granted by the responsible adult. Digitally competent children may quickly push the boundaries of what they are permitted to do and demand more autonomy. This may have implications for researchers who could find children's increased agency results in higher rates of refusal and non-participation. Equally, children who find ways around firewalls, child profiles, and password protection could circumvent normal consent procedures by gaining access to parent emails or phones, inadvertently self-select themselves in sampling procedures, or self-complete research surveys.

3.3.2 THE ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

A semiotic interpretation of the university ethics form suggests that conducting marketing and social research with children aged 16 and under is ethically risky. The language and symbolism is that of 'high risk' and 'red flag' with research projects to be considered at faculty rather than departmental committee level. This is, according to Farrell (2005a, p.3), a 'heighten[ed] protective governance of children and their lives' attributed to society's 'moral panic'. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2007, p.169) identify a paradox in children's research where inexperienced researchers should practise the questioning and observation techniques to

prepare them for the 'ethical dilemmas' they may meet but that ethics is the one skill that 'should never be learned in practice'. No wonder that research with children has the reputation of being 'difficult' to execute (Skanfors, 2009, p.18) and in common parlance, we advise each other to 'never work with animals or children'.

The breadth of disciplines which encompass research with children has created ethical challenges for researchers seeking to address ontological and methodological issues, particularly in fields such as healthcare where children were previously denied rights of participation and their voices have not been heard (James and Prout, 1990, p.27). Access to children as research participants is controlled by gatekeepers, such as parents, guardians, teachers, club leaders, social workers, and medical staff; all of whom have different safeguarding concerns. Gatekeepers may protect children but can also control which voices are heard with teachers putting children forward who are 'articulate' or 'good representatives' of the school (Horgan, 2017, p.248). Self-selection bias is also common in school research; the sorts of parents who always volunteer to fundraise for a school or participate in extracurricular activities, are also those who would opt-in to research studies with a social benefit.

Another ethical concern is the dynamic of the power relationship between the adult researcher and the child participant which has been discussed in Chapter 3.1, and the physical presence of the researcher in domains such as the home or school where pre-existing power structures may exist (Foucault, 1978, pp.92-96). Christensen and Prout (2002, p.482) propose taking a priori stance of 'ethical symmetry' considering as a 'starting point' that the relationship between the researcher and children, or the researcher and adults, is the same. The authors state that this assumption means methods and standards are the same, but practices can be 'in line with children's experiences, interests, values, and everyday routines'. This approach might be complicated in practice by society's 'moral panic' about children's research (Farrell, 2005a, p.3); a power parity might be a red flag for stakeholders concerned about potential researcher misconduct, children's behaviour, safeguarding, and any other impropriety. A good example of this in practice is Mandell (1998, p.50) taking a fully immersive 'least-adult' role and putting herself on a level with the children. Her passive observation of children urinating in the playground, swearing, or attacking one another would be questioned today.

A growing ethical risk is that children with undiagnosed or unsupported special educational needs could be at risk during the research process, or a risk to the researcher and other pupils. Some 11.6% of UK pupils receive support for special education needs (Department for Education, 2016). Although this reduced from 1,301,445 in 2015 to 1,228,785 in 2016, this is due to a continuing decline in the number of pupils without an official statement of needs or a health and care (EHC) plan (Tickle, 2017). Cuts in school funding and council budgets means many children are not receiving the assessments, care plans, or services they need. Researchers may therefore find their techniques e.g., role play, do not elicit a response from some children or indeed, may provoke an undesired or surprising reaction in others. This can be addressed via risk assessments and considering the possibility of children with behavioural or educational needs forming part of the sample. It is important to note that omitting certain groups from the study or over-emphasising their contribution would be a form of bias.

Obtaining genuine permission (Rule 16) for the child to participate in research in an appropriate format from the parent, guardian or loco parentis is also an important ethical issue

(MRS, 2019, p.13). This is central to online methodologies where permission could be faked by a child accessing a parent's email account or profile. The complexity of the consent process can be off-putting to novice researchers. Despite the move towards research 'with' children, research projects 'on' children still take place; adults may speak for children (Christensen and James, 2008, p.2) and do, particularly in commercial online market research via panels and omnibuses where large samples are surveyed quickly and cheaply. If we followed the reasoning that 'everything the child can say can be said better, more completely by an adult' (Lee, 2001, p.89) then the voice of the child would forever be ignored. Children have historically lacked a voice and research studies, particularly in health, have not always consulted children as equal participants. Conducting research with children is more challenging, both ethically and procedurally, than research by proxy but it is achievable by approaching the ethics application systematically and thoroughly.

From this overview of key ethical issues relating to children's research, the research methodology of this study will address the following ethical considerations: informed consent; location of the research encounter; the relationship and role between the researcher; encouraging participation and using participative techniques; the use of incentives; dissemination of the results; and specific contextual issues relating to researching children's digital behaviours.

3.3.2.1 INFORMED CONSENT

The MRS Code of Conduct (2019, p.9) provides the professional standard for market researchers. Rules 16-18 (Idem, p.13) state that members must ensure the permission of a responsible adult, namely one with 'personal accountability' for the well-being of the child, is obtained and verified before the child participates in a research project. The details of this adult should be recorded by name and relationship or role. Checking informed consent is, as stated earlier, crucial in online studies where it is harder to verify the identity of the responsible adult.

Obtaining double consent, from the parent/guardian as well as the child participant, is both ethical and good practice (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007, p.173; Hill, 1997, p.179). Hammersley (2015, pp.569-570) goes further to argue that not gaining children's clear assent is an 'infringement of children's rights'. Eldén (2013, p.16), whose research took place in Sweden which is also subject to the Ethical Review Act 2003, found that parental consent could prevent some children from having a voice and full confidentiality (from their parents). This related to research taking place in the home where parents remained in the room and 'eavesdropped'. Parental consent cannot be bypassed so it appears that working with parents to reassure them of the purpose of the study and that data will not be collected about the family by proxy (via the child) may better convince them of the study's merits.

Danby and Farrell (2005, pp.52-53) and Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell (2015, pp.45-46) suggested children's permission can be granted through a variety of forms such as using a symbol e.g., 'flower, star or snowman', through their initials or handwritten name, by using a nickname, or by choosing emojis reflecting how they feel about the research process. Both Danby and Farrell (Ibid) and Alderson (2005, p.33) recommended a codename as a consent device, with the dual purpose of providing anonymity to the participant from the outset,

however Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell (2015, p.50) suggested that some children prefer to use their own name.

Even if the responsible adult has provided permission, the child has the right to withdraw from the research process, just as much and as equally as an adult (MacNaughton and Smith, 2005, p.115). This is seen as particularly important in longitudinal studies according to Alderson (2004, p.107) where children can become fed up with contributing every year. Banister and Booth (2005, p.162) however, question how confident children are in practice giving consent or opting out because of the power relations between the generations.

Part of the informed consent process is the 'conversation opening' according to Danby and Farrell (2005, pp.49-53) offering a significant opportunity to demonstrate to children that they have the 'right' to be considered 'competent and legitimate participants' and 'reaffirm' their consent. Considering the competence of a child to consent may depend on their individual characteristics (Alderson, 2005, p.34). This competence relates not to legal competence, but to 'informed assent' that the child is aware of the purpose of the study, its implications including how the data will be used, and that they know they have a choice to participate and the right to withdraw (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007, pp. 173-174).

This also relates to their cognitive development (see Chapter 2.2). Alderson (2005, p.34) suggests assessing competence to assent by asking children to explain what they understand about the research and their rights. Leaflets using diagrams and pictures may be useful for parents or another responsible adult to explain the purpose of the research to younger children or those with specific learning difficulties, whether that be officially diagnosed or suspected. For very young children, Skanfors (2009, p.18) suggests researchers use their 'ethical radar' to intuit 'children's ways of expressing acceptance and withdrawal' reflecting on her research where she missed specific examples of resistance during the fieldwork period.

In terms of consent for this study, it will be crucial to ensure that all stakeholders agree with the research taking place and that children particularly have buy-in. Having a range of options for children to use to signify their consent appears to be a valuable approach, and using a codename makes the process of anonymisation easier and of course, fun! Explaining the topic (the concept of brands and digital marketing) could be challenging for younger children so using a conversation opener with a picture-based information sheet could make it easier to explain the process to children with different levels of cognitive development. These learnings will be incorporated into the research methods.

3.3.2.2 LOCATION

The choice of location for children's research, such as a school, home, clinic, or club house, is critical to establishing the power relationship between the researcher and the child (as discussed in Chapter 3.1). David, et al. (2005, p.131) suggest comfort is the most important factor to create a 'home from home' environment but Yee and Andrews (2006, p.401) warn that conducting research in a private setting creates 'ethical, emotional and methodological issues' that cannot be adequately prepared for or considered within professional codes.

Morrow (2005, p.158) worried that school-based research creates a 'captive sample' because of the act of taking permission letters home and agreement being obtained from the school, teachers, and the parents. Of course, children do have the right to withdraw even within a

school or when permission from adults has been granted, but this may not be made clear to the children in a poorly designed study. Location will have to be carefully considered from an ethical perspective as well as the practicalities of recruitment and sampling.

3.3.2.3 RELATIONSHIPS AND ROLES

The power stance of the researcher towards the child and the level of participation in the research encounter should be linked to the ethical behaviour of the researcher in the child's environment. Walkerdine (2001, p.17) warns that the primary school is now seen as a 'site of danger' with concern about the 'violence and sexuality of adults'. Equally, Angell, et al., (2010, p.917) found in a review of medical ethics applications that three quarters of the concerns raised focused on the vulnerable status of children and the need to protect children during research. Researchers are likely to be required by their ethics committee or professional body to apply for a standard Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS), but this has its limitations. The standard check shows spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands, and final warnings against declared names (Gov, 2018) but only an enhanced check, or enhanced check with barred lists would show whether the person is barred from working with children. The check does not have an official expiry date, so a person may have subsequent convictions which would not show up unless a new check was applied for, or the applicant had signed up to the update service. Identity fraud or not including all names or addresses used in the past is relatively easy and the check does not cover time lived outside of the UK. The check is therefore not a concrete indication that the researcher is safe to work with children. To protect both parties, it seems wise to conduct research in open areas or for researchers to be accompanied by another professional when conducting research.

The researcher is responsible for the child's well-being during the research. Alderson (2005, p.27) cautioned that even asking simple ice-breaker style questions like 'Who do you live with?' could be upsetting for children who have experienced family break-down. Considering well-being, Nairn and Clarke (2012, p.184) recommended researching children in friendship pairs or triads finding it to be more reassuring to children and facilitating 'natural and spontaneous' responses. It seems that friendship pairs provide the benefit of additional safeguarding for both the researcher and children, as well as a supportive research encounter.

3.3.2.4 PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATIVE TECHNIQUES

Participative techniques, particularly where children are co-creators of the research process, can result in the ethical risk that children 'contribute and reveal far more about themselves than they intended' which they might later regret (Alderson, 2004, p.100). Meloni, Vanthuyne and Rousseau (2015, p.119) counter this risk by suggesting that a greater dialogue between young people and researchers can lead to the co-construction of a 'third space' for 'mutual ethical encounter' where the two parties can build experience and trust. These techniques can only be facilitated through the employment of age-appropriate data collection tools such as the survey, discussion guide and stimulus material (Clough, 2016, p.5).

3.3.2.5 INCENTIVES

Incentives can encourage participation, but to what end? Indeed, overly generous gifts could be viewed as coercion, and who should be incentivised: the school, parent, or child? Incentives, as with all other aspects of research design, should be appropriate to the age of

the child and to the project (MRS, 2019, pp.13-14). Fargas-Malet, et al., (2010, p.181) propose finding a balance between acknowledging time spent on the project and thanking children for their participation versus pressurising people to take part and expecting them to say what the researcher wants to hear. Banister and Booth (2005, p.164) opted not to incentivise in favour of providing 'fun experiences' but Nairn and Clarke (2012, p.187) found small gifts like pens or vouchers appropriate. It is likely that research taking place in schools would need to be seen as a valuable use of time for the children, whether it is for social or educational benefit, and a small token of appreciation would be acceptable as a thanks for their time.

3.3.2.6 SHARING RESULTS

Children's research can often use play-based or creative techniques generating a raft of research artefacts for the researcher or as the child sees it, a set of lovely drawings or models that they would like to take home to their family. Who owns or has the rights to these artworks, and should they be returned (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007, p.180)? It seems that ownership should not be assumed by the researcher and permission should be sought to keep them. An alternative is to video record, photograph or photocopy them if the child does want to retain ownership. They could be returned after the research is written up, but children deal in the here and now, and this would not be understood by very young children.

Children may include the names of siblings or pets when telling their story or biography, so should these also be given anonymity with a pseudonym? Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell (2015, p.50) stressed that visual data such as drawings, photographs and videos with visual cues can more easily be identified outside of the research encounter, so it must be made clear to children how their artefacts will be used and disseminated. Carter and Ford (2013, p.102) however, indicated that some children 'strongly object' to their names being removed from drawings and subject to correct consent, their names could be retained for publication. Using a codename as mentioned above, could perhaps address this concern.

The Market Research Society (2019, p.14) codifies (Rule 22) that researchers should not collect material about other individuals from a child, but children are likely to share anecdotes about their household. Davies (2017, p.99) faced the dilemma of whether to use a participant's word for word account of her mother's 'vehement' opinion of her father and considered the ethics of using emotional accounts versus the bias of falsely presenting children's lives as 'smooth and straightforward'. Banister and Booth (2005, p.164) chose to omit some anecdotes about grief, peer pressure and divorce to protect the child and their family's confidentiality. In qualitative research, this could be addressed in the transcript process with anonymisation or deletion of sensitive or personal data.

3.3.2.7 SPECIFIC DIGITAL ISSUES

Researching the digital world of primary school children means asking them to reveal their usage of devices, apps, and websites, some of which may not be fully known to their parents or guardians e.g., using a device when they have been told not to. This may involve exposing their vulnerabilities, revealing rule breaking, or questioning their actions. Protection issues may be identified within the research interview which a researcher visiting a school would be obligated to report to the Safeguarding Lead (Department for Education, 2014).

Researchers examining children's use of social media are effectively intruding into children's private space where they spend time and engage with friends. Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016, p.94) were exposed to teenagers' use of social media platforms to present different faces to different audiences with 'layers of [her] identity' presented in alternative forms across Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter, which the researchers were permitted to view but not record. This is now commonly known as 'Finstagram' versus 'Rinstagram' – the difference between a false and real Instagram account where the images may present a glossier or more realistic version of real-life (Rutledge, 2017).

Asking children to engage in participative activities online may also expose them to risk and may extend their digital footprint (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017, pp.54-70). It also raises questions of secondary consent, when researchers may examine a child's social media profile with permission, to find that profile contains images and posts from another child (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017, pp.59-60).

Ethically, it would not be appropriate to ask to see the social media profiles (if any) of the children in the study as they would be underage according to the age restrictions set by the channels. This will not form part of any questioning.

3.3.3 IMPLICATIONS

The development of children's rights formalised through legislation was a slow process, which mapped the social construction of childhood. Children's rights in research are represented by the consent process. Although children cannot take part in a research project without permission from a responsible adult, they have the right to refuse to participate on their own terms. Farrell (2005b, p.171) propounds that consent is not about moving power from one person to another, or 'scaling down adult-oriented research to children', but by considering children to be independently competent and acting on 'their (un)willingness to be involved in the research'. This means that good ethical practice allows researchers to work with children to truly hear their voices.

A strong consent process that acknowledges 'moral panic' from society and relevant stakeholders, as well as children's right to give their own informed consent, appears to be the best way to find a balance between acknowledging children's agency and managing the ethical responsibilities of the researcher. This is coupled with adopting an appropriate role or power stance, choosing an appropriate location for the research, and requesting permission to use or copy materials created in the research interview. These learnings will be drawn into the methodology for this study providing a robust ethical foundation for the research.

3.4 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The literature pertaining to research methods with children has been reviewed in Chapter 3, assessing the potential ethical challenges, the use of participative research methods as a way of realising the child's agency, and the potential power relationship between the adult researcher and the child participant in market research studies. This goes some way towards answering RQ4 on the best way to explore children's views and agentic behaviours towards brands in a digital environment and has helped to guide the research design for this marketing study. This sub-chapter will present the resulting research procedures for this study.

3.4.1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aim of this study, as discussed in Chapter 1, is to provide greater understanding of the factors that influence children to form brand choices in a digital world, and the nature of their online brand engagements. It seeks to explore the changing behaviour of children in the digital world and the drivers for their brand preference, particularly in relation to the independence of their decision-making and whether there is a difference between online, offline, and omnichannel brand interactions.

As stated in the first chapter, the aim of the research can be addressed through two research objectives:

RO1: To investigate the drivers of brand choice for children in a digital world.

RO2: To explore how children engage with brands online compared to other types of interaction.

3.4.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is conceptualised using four elements according to Creswell and Plano's adaptation of Crotty's work (1998, cited in Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p.39), namely the paradigm worldview, the theoretical lens, the methodological approach, and the methods of data collection. This framework will scaffold the discussion of the research methods in this sub-chapter.

3.4.2.1 PARADIGM WORLDVIEW

In terms of epistemology and 'what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge' (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2015, p.127), the study's objectives focus on generating rich and detailed knowledge around children's individual behaviours and relationships with brands in a digital environment. These objectives called for an exploratory approach to understand more about children's feelings towards brands, their use of digital devices, and differences in behaviour by age or cognitive development.

Malhotra and Birks (2003, p.138) recommend two key research paradigms for marketing researchers, namely positivist and interpretivist. An interpretivist approach, commonly associated with qualitative research, allowed for the researcher to take an active role, and engage with the young subjects, in a more informal and personal way (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p.139). As the right-hand column in Table 17: Positivist Versus Interpretivist Approach shows, research could take place in a cultural setting, either the home or school, which would facilitate engagement allowing the children to feel comfortable in a familiar place, part of their own personal geography, allowing the researcher to really enter children's 'social world' (Wilson, 2014, p.10).

Table 17: Positivist Versus Interpretivist Approach

Positivist Approach to Research	Interpretivist Approach to Research
Objective role, detached from participants	Active role, engaged with participants
Researcher is independent of research	Researcher is interdependent with research
No personal bias	Examine subject in-depth in cultural setting
Empirical research, scientific nature	Observation and ethnography common
Deductive approach	Inductive approach
Quantifiable, representative, structured	Qualitative, subjective
Validity and convincing arguments	Validity and convincing insights

Source: Adapted from Wilson (2014, p.14)

The interpretivist acknowledges the ‘array of interpretations of realities or social acts’ (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p.139) and the need to draw out different views or stories through observation or questioning. This type of approach demands the development of rapport between the researcher and participants, the right method and approach to interacting and communicating, and the use of appropriate language, logic, and approach.

Interpretivists are interdependent with their research interacting with the participants. The benefit of this approach is the ‘collaborative and participatory’ nature of the research (Wilson, 2014, p.10) allowing the researcher to use an inductive approach to move from observation to theory. This approach fitted well with the discussions on the benefits of using appropriate participative methods (in Chapter 3.2), whilst ensuring that the methods were appropriate and of interest and relevance to the young participants.

The interdependence of the researcher to the participants and the subjectivity of qualitative research can also be viewed critically as a drawback. It is important to consider potential issues of researcher bias, e.g., the researcher considering a child’s anecdotes about digital device usage negatively because it differs to their own personal standards. Although interpretivist findings can be criticised for their subjectivity, they can be considered more objectively in relation to the secondary data findings (namely, the literature review that has been conducted for this study) to add credibility and reinforce findings. This relates to axiology, the role of values in the inquiry. The issue of interdependence and subjectivity will be discussed more fully later in this sub-chapter in relation to the nature of the relationship or role taken by the researcher when engaging with the young participants in their cultural setting.

Ontology relates to the nature of reality. In this study, the ‘motivation and social interactions of respondents’ (Wilson, 2014, p.11) will be carefully examined with a subjectivist view. This is linked to interpretivism. The idea that ‘individuals have their own unique interpretations of that world’ (Morgan, 2007, p.72) applies to this study. The socially constructed notion of the child (Ariès, 1960; Corsaro, 2015), within the realm of childhood, is an ontological being to be acknowledged and granted rights who is neither ‘possession’ or ‘object’ (Knowles, 2009, p.29). This means that children each have their own viewpoint and take on the digital world in which they immerse themselves. Therefore, this interpretivist research design allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed insights from individual young subjects, of all ages and backgrounds.

3.4.2.2 THEORETICAL LENS

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p.47) identify two types of theoretical foundation to shape the direction of a study: the social sciences theory or an emancipatory theory. Emancipatory theories address issues around 'power and social relationships' and 'advocate for an improvement in human interests and society' according to Sweetman, Badiee and Creswell (2010, p.441). Studies are likely to focus on marginalised participants by gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic status. Although gender, ethnicity, specific learning difficulties and socioeconomic status are acknowledged in this study, there is no specific focus on marginalised groups. Historically, children have lacked a voice and the discussions in Chapters 2.1 and 2.2 consider power relationships and children's agency in the 'new sociology of childhood'. Whilst the influence of power and the historical marginalisation of children is strongly recognised in this study, the research purpose is not to advocate for an improvement in children's interests and society's treatment of them.

This study will be guided by marketing theory, in particular 'brand relationship quality' theory in relation to young consumer-brand interactions. It will consider major variables such as brand loyalty and commitment, types of relationship and the strength of those interactions. The theoretical lens takes its foundations from the work of Fournier (1998) which is discussed in the literature review (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.66). In terms of bibliometrics, Fournier's work on 'brand relationship quality' has been cited by 7,986 researchers (Google Scholar, 29th August 2018).

3.4.2.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The previous discussion on research philosophy has set the scene for an exploratory qualitative approach incorporating two stages: 1) a literature review of prior academic work and relevant grey literature from professional practice to understand 'brand relationship quality' theory in digital marketing for children; and 2) qualitative interviewing and observation with children in a cultural setting using active participation techniques.

The choice of qualitative methods in this study was primarily because of the need to explore how children engage with brands online compared to other types of interaction, and to understand the range of interpretations of their social world (Wilson, 2014, p.10; Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p.139).

Quantitative surveying methods are a valid methodology, and it would be hard to replicate the methodology for the Ofcom tracking study which conducts around 3,000 in-home quantitative interviews annually which is a robust but resource intensive approach. This is also supported with BARB television data and insight from major children's research agencies. However, in-home interviews with children can be influenced by parents and by the researchers' conflicting demands of behaving professionally and the social obligations of being a 'good guest' (Yee and Andrews, 2006). There is also no opportunity to probe and check children's real understanding of key concepts like the internet and social media in structured surveys (Nunez-Gomez, Sanchez-Herrera and Pintado-Blanco, 2020, p.8). Qualitative research has been used to good effect by commercial researchers like Nickelodeon (2015) to gain a 'deeper understanding' of children's media usage and perceptions of advertising. It has also been the methodology of choice for many authors (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Punch, 2002b; Carter and Ford, 2013) employing more child-centred participative approaches to realise children's

agency (a key component of this study). The specific qualitative approach was based on simple participant observation and depth interviewing using arts and creative task-based activities.

The choice of depth interviews over focus groups was purely practical. Focus groups could feasibly take place in the cultural setting of a school environment but would be difficult to manage with younger children finding it harder to stay located in a circle or at a table. It would be more challenging to record and transcribe interviews and associate comments to individual children if they all spoke over each other or were distracted by creative activities. It could also lead to behaviour management challenges which would impact upon the role taken by the researcher, the ethical process relating to conduct within the school, and risk management e.g., if multiple children started rocking chairs or running around. The benefits of a group discussion are the ability to determine social and cultural influences and differences between participants, and draw on creative thinking (McGivern, 2013, p.163), so with that in mind, paired depths were used in this study, consisting of two classmates of the same gender in each pair. Children find these 'less intimidating and embarrassing' (McGivern, 2013, p.163) and Jones and Glynn (2019, p.105) found that children felt more 'comfortable' in this situation.

The benefit of using arts and creative task-based activities was discussed in Chapter 3.2. Pimlott-Wilson (2012, p.136) found visual methods helped to 'gain insights into the context of children's lived experiences', and Punch (2002b, p.330) found that combining 'traditional adult research methods, such as participant observation and interviews' with task-based methods meant children could be treated as adults and allowed to 'display their competencies' whilst feeling more comfortable with the researcher, particularly when they lacked experience of communicating with an unknown adult in the research encounter. Carter and Ford (2013, p.105) were equally positive about the use of child-centred creative techniques but countered that an 'informal and flexible environment' is important and that children are not all the same with the same interests or skills. A range of creative and arts-based activities were therefore used in this study giving children an active choice in their participation.

As the children engaged with the creative and arts-based tasks, simple observation was used to watch them create their own artefacts. This was accompanied by simple questioning, asking them to explain what they were making. We were all children. When observing children, we recall our own experiences shaped by culture, language, and gender. Fawcett (2009, p.26) says 'what we see depends on what we bring to the observation in our own minds'. Our attitudes, values, professional perspective, objectives and, even potentially and somewhat contentiously, our parental status will affect our capability to observe children and record our findings, without bias. The simple questioning could be used to explore children's understanding of key concepts and adjust the use of language according to age and cognitive understanding, e.g., talking about advertising yielded no response from the youngest children so it was important to gently explore this, trying different terms that may be used at home like 'ads' or 'advert' or asking them what they had seen on television in relation to a brand (the children did a brand logo sorting activity as outlined in Chapter 3.4.2.5).

The challenges that arise in observing children's behaviour originate from the act of observation itself. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics suggests we can only 'calculate probabilities for where things are and how they will behave' and that the 'act of observation affects the particle being observed' (Jha, 2013). Children may act differently under

observation. To minimise this impact, the researcher showed interest and was very positive about the children's efforts with the task-based activities. The children's buddies were also very enthusiastic about discussing their partner's work alongside their own.

Researchers can consider using video cameras to try to 'minimise the influence' they may have on children's behaviour (Shaffer, 1993 cited in Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008, p.17). Children can find it confusing or difficult to understand the status of the adult researcher particularly when research takes place in the school environment and if they suspect their answers will be shared with their teacher. In this study, the children were asked for permission to video record the interviews and were involved with the recording process to check it was working allowing them to actively observe their buddy through the lens of the camera and confirm their consent.

3.4.2.4 THE TARGET POPULATION

To facilitate sampling and the logistics and ethics of running paired depth interviews, the cultural setting of a school was chosen over the home environment of one of the children. This meant that the school database could be used as a recruitment tool, subject to data protection laws, and that children would feel comfortable taking part in the research activities in a familiar environment.

Parents were not chosen as a unit of analysis for this study. It would be interesting to understand more about parents' influence on children's brand choices and preference, but this is beyond the scope of this project, although certainly of interest for future research plans.

Parents were also not asked to answer research questions on behalf of their children as this would go against the ontological perspective of the child with rights, who is neither 'possession' or 'object' (Knowles, 2009, p.29). It was important to enter children's social worlds to explore this issue, and to ensure this was research 'with' children not 'on' children. Jones and Glynn (2019, p.105) highlighted in their own study that in some research settings, parental presence could be a constraint upon 'children's ability to talk freely'. It was anticipated that when the nature of the questioning moved towards digital device usage, children would feel more comfortable talking in front of their friends as opposed to their parents, and that this may also address any bias from under-reporting digital device usage where children might decide to respond in a way that is 'viewed more favourably' or is socially desirable (McGivern, 2013, p.287).

A primary school for children aged 4 to 11 was selected for the study due to its proximity to the researcher. The researcher's children attended the school, but the participants were not known to her. The school was in Huntingdonshire, a non-metropolitan district of Cambridgeshire, in the East of England. Huntingdonshire has a higher proportion of primary school aged children than the rest of England (age 5-9, index 104; age 10-14, index 105); is more affluent (59% ABC1, index 110) compared to England but is less affluent than the rest of Cambridgeshire; and has a cultural mix that is representative of the East of England with predominantly UK / EU nationalities, particularly Eastern European (UK Census, 2011). This school had a broad social and cultural mix including a variety of ethnicities and sociodemographics from affluent to disadvantaged and was located in a rural market town close to the City of Peterborough, so provided a mix of traditional rural and newcomer/commuter belt consumer behaviours.

Non-probability sampling was used for the buddy depth interviews. The year groups were divided up into segments. This was a primary school divided into an Infants and Juniors on separate sites, with three-year groups in the Infants and four in the Juniors. The Foundation segment covered the Early Years Foundation Stage commonly known as the 'Reception Class' with the very youngest children aged 4 to 5. The second segment was made up of the remaining Infants in Key Stage 1 of the education system in Years 1 and 2. The third and fourth segments were formed in the Junior school from the Key Stage 2 children. All buddy pairs were single gendered. There were no children who identified as other genders. Children were divided into boy and girl groups because children of this age can be reluctant to mix (Table 18: Breakdown of Qualitative Sampling).

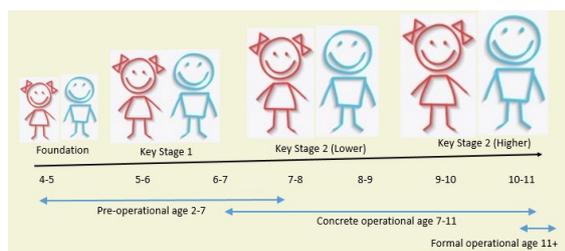
There were 8 buddy pairs in total with each pair interviewed twice (repeated cross-sectional within one month) to avoid children becoming tired, bored, upset, or distracted in a longer interview. An invitation to participate in the research was sent out to parents of the school by the school office (as data controller) and class teachers chose appropriate buddy pairs for each age group from this group, considering a good social mix across the school using non-probability judgement sampling.

Table 18: Breakdown of Qualitative Sampling

Pair	Key Stage	Year Group	Gender	Age
1	Foundation	Reception	Girls	4-5
2	Foundation	Reception	Boys	4-5
3	1	Year 1	Girls	5-6
4	1	Year 2	Boys	6-7
5	2 (Lower)	Year 3	Girls	7-8
6	2 (Lower)	Year 4	Boys	8-9
7	2 (Higher)	Year 5	Girls	9-10
8	2 (Higher)	Year 6	Boys	10-11

The sampling breakdown matched Piaget's stage development theory of cognitive development (Isaacs and Lawrence, 1973, pp.15-16) as a useful heuristic device (Figure 15: Ages Mapped Against Piaget's Stage Development Theory), as discussed in Chapter 2.1, by drawing sample from the preoperational and the concrete operational stages. This provided the opportunity to analyse the results by age and stage development.

Figure 15: Ages Mapped Against Piaget's Stage Development Theory



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

3.4.2.5 DATA COLLECTION

The qualitative interviews employed creative arts and play-based methodologies to encourage children to express their ideas and opinions more easily and to realise their agency (Harden et al., 2000; Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010; Lomax, et al., 2011; Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Carter and Ford, 2013; Gillies and Robinson, 2010).

A range of creative and arts-based tools were offered to the children as task-based activities. This fitted with Carter and Ford's thoughts on acknowledging children's skills, interests, and preferences (2013, p.105). These activities included: colouring, sticking, modelling with PlayDoh, playing with dolls house furniture, using the computer game Minecraft, and LEGO bricks.

The popular 3D 'sandbox' computer game Minecraft (Chapter 2.3.3.1: Caselet – Minecraft) was included as one of the creative and arts-based tools for children to choose from for the participative task-based activities. It was chosen because of its versatility and the freedom that it offered to young participants to recreate their own physical worlds in this online space (Niemeyer and Gerber, 2015, p.217), and to explain their use of the internet and the spaces in which it is used (see topic guides below). Wernholm and Vigmo (2015, p.230) used Minecraft successfully in the context of an ethnographic study and qualitative interviews to explore 'the lifeworlds of children' through their 'knowledge-making dialogues'. This indicated that children in this study would be able to use Minecraft to explain their digital lives and talk about their activity as they were building. Pellicone and Ahn (2018, p.440) also used an ethnographic study and qualitative interviews to research a young boy's game play on Minecraft by screen capturing his weekly play sessions and writing field notes and memos. In their study, they wanted to 'form ties between the online behaviour of gameplay on the screen and the offline factors that influence play in the day-to-day life of the participant'. This resonated with the objectives of this study seeking to understand the relationship between children and brands online and the participants' offline lives. Minecraft was therefore added to the portfolio of creative and arts-based tools for children to choose from, both for its creative freedom and opportunity to support knowledge-making dialogues, but also because it balanced out the options that would be appealing to older children who might not be attracted to dolls house furniture and colouring.

Observation was an important component of the research methodology, particularly with the very youngest participants, watching the children engage with toys and other play-based research activities to gauge their familiarity with the internet, their feelings and attitudes towards brands, and their cognitive development.

The discussion guide was divided into key themes supported by the task-based activities. This was tailored to the age and cognitive stage of the children with flexibility on the day according to the children's levels of interest, stamina, and capabilities. The youngest children had shorter interviews with more free play.

The first set of interviews focused on digital device use, personal geographies, and perceptions of safety. The topic guide was flexible but generally structured as follows:

- Welcome / Child Consent Form / Lights, Camera, Action! – child operates the camera.
- My Family – Task-based Activity (range of options to complete).
- Third Party Projection - Tell Zog the Alien about the internet (range of arts equipment).
- Use of the internet and spaces where it is used, independence of use, use of social media, digital devices, dual screening, time used, etc (range of creative equipment – building blocks, Minecraft, dolls house, etc).
- Internet safety, fears and worries, social media, etc.
- Reflecting on their activities – were they able to say what they wanted?
- Thanks / Wrap – How did they perceive the role of the researcher?
- Incentives / Turn off camera / Return to classroom.

The second interview focused on perceptions of brands online and offline. As before, the discussion guide was flexible but generally structured as follows:

- Welcome / Reminder Child Consent Form / Lights, Camera, Action! – child operates the camera.
- Activity Sheet – My Branded Breakfast (range of arts and modelling equipment).
- Brand Sorting Task – Sentiment (brand flashcards with logos).
- Self-connections to Advertising Activity Sheet (range of arts and modelling equipment).
- Relationships with Brands (continue with previous arts and creative activities).

With the use of these methods in a qualitative approach, the subjectivity and interdependence of the researcher with the participants and the standpoint employed by the researcher during the interview was critical (Mandell, 1998; Randall, 2012; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Elton-Chalcraft, 2011; Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, 2005; Gillies and Robinson, 2010; Hill, Laybourn and Borland, 1996). The review of literature on the role of the researcher in Chapter 3.1 informed the research methods and the testing of a conceptual framework (researcher's toolkit).

Towards the end of the first discussion, children were shown a prompt sheet (Figure 16: Prompt Sheet of Researcher's Roles) with pictures of several roles the researcher may have taken in the interview. These roles were established via the methodological literature review in this chapter but had to be understandable by children of all ages between 4 and 11 and cognitive stages. The children were asked which picture matched their idea of the role the researcher had taken or to think of another description. The role options were rotated with each buddy pair to eliminate bias.

Figure 16: Prompt Sheet of Researcher's Roles



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

Additional explanation was provided, if required, based on the age and cognitive stage of the children:

"I have one more question for you. There's no wrong or right answer. So, when I was asking you questions today, who did you think I was most like? [Shows sheet and points to images in turn] It could be a child, a teaching assistant, a teacher, a Mum, a grown-up, someone who works in an office, a bit of a mixture of those things or something else completely different. What do you think? You can say whatever you like..."

It was important to give children permission to be honest to alleviate fears of hurting the researcher's feelings by naming roles that might insinuate characteristics like 'strict' or 'bossy' or concerns that they could get into trouble for being impolite to a 'guest' of the school within pre-existing systems of power. The children were encouraged to have their own opinion within the buddy pair and to avoid collusion.

Before the research took place, the role of the researcher in this context had to be considered. The children had been recruited to discuss their use of tablets and smartphones, so it was likely that discussion would relate to parenting issues e.g., being told off for spending too long online, accessing age-inappropriate games or websites, or personal safety concerns. Acting like a child was unlikely to be effective when discussing digital technology as these digitally native children would see the researcher as an older person who would be less skilled at playing or understanding their favourite apps and games.

The positioning of 'research practitioner' or as simplified for the children 'someone who works in an office' allowed the projection of professional adult status but also permitted power sharing with the children, encouraging them to explain how they use the internet, to make choices about the creative activities, and to know their opinions were of importance. In terms of the power relationship, this could be defined as 'sharing' but closer to the 'dominant' segment to account for the need to ensure the children adhered to the school's strict behavioural policies, by not disturbing other classrooms during the fieldwork. It was important not to move fully towards a 'dominant' standpoint to avoid taking on teacher or parent status and biasing the research findings – as these types of authority figure would potentially be influencers in relation to device, internet, and brand use.

The role projected therefore was that of a 'research practitioner' or in the children's terms 'someone who works in an office' allowing the researcher to enter the cultural setting, to project adult professional status as a visitor (not a teacher), whilst sharing power with the children to realise their agency.

3.4.2.6 ETHICAL APPROACH

Following a robust ethical process was crucial to produce a credible set of results in this research. The following ethical issues were identified for the qualitative interviews:

- The power-play dynamic of the school environment.
- The role of the adult researcher.
- Access via the gatekeeper (Headteacher).
- Bias within the sampling process.
- Triple consent process (Headteacher, Parent/Guardian and Child).
- Personal safeguarding and children's welfare.
- Anonymity and privacy of other members of the child's family.
- Use of gaming software within the interview.
- Length and characteristics of the research interview.
- Recording and safeguarding of personal data.
- The use of incentives.

The use of buddy interviews addressed some power imbalance for the children as they then outnumbered the researcher, but it also provided an extra safeguarding mechanism for all parties.

Behavioural issues were a strong ethical concern. The school had strict policies on discipline and expected visitors to be treated with respect, but as a visitor who would be working with the children in an open classroom space, the role projected as an adult researcher would have a distinct impact on their willingness to participate in the research activities. There was pressure on the researcher to allow the children their agency, but not to cause disruption in the school or contravene any of their strict rules on behaviour, noise or safeguarding.

Access to the selected school was achieved relatively easily via a letter to the Headteacher. There were several caveats. The Headteacher, as the designated safeguarding lead, insisted she must be informed of any safeguarding issues that might arise during the interviews with the children. Although this felt like a betrayal of their privacy, the obligations to keep the child

safe rank higher than researcher privacy. This was particularly relevant to the study as questions would be asked about internet usage. It was possible that a child might indicate, even inadvertently, that they were at risk of harm e.g., if an older child revealed they were meeting someone secretly that they had met on the internet. If this, or a similar situation were to happen, then normal school safeguarding policies (Keeping Children Safe in Education, DofEd, Statutory Guidance, April 2014) would apply as the research was taking place with school pupils on school premises.

Secondly, a DBS check had to be undertaken before research could take place, and finally, all research had to take place in an open area for safeguarding reasons. This proved to be the most challenging caveat to meet as physical space was limited in the infant school. Both interview spaces provided were surrounded by open-plan classrooms or were used as corridors. The library space provided a more conducive space to engage in the research activities, but it was challenging to hear the children clearly when a teaching assistant was (poorly) managing classroom disruption nearby by continuously shouting. The use of an open area was an advantage in that it offered protection to the researcher and to the children in the researcher's temporary care as a visiting adult to their school.

Bias within the sampling process for the qualitative research was possible because of the lack of access to the sampling frame. Due to data protection legislation, the researcher was not granted access to the class registers. A letter of invitation was sent out with the school newsletter and the class teachers encouraged participation. The teachers made the selection of children against the simple quota with the aim of achieving a good social mix through judgement. The school secretary compiled the final list of the children who had permission to participate. There was a risk that the participating children were most likely to come from families who were more engaged with school activities e.g., reading the school newsletter or volunteering. This was mitigated by the simple incentives provided which were more of a pull for families who were not used to volunteering their time for free, e.g., with Parent Teacher Association, or similar, activities.

A letter to parents, which was approved by the University Ethics Committee clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the process of informed consent, and all other matters. Parents were asked to discuss the research with their child and provide consent themselves and by proxy for their child. The process of gaining the child's consent was three-fold, firstly via the Headteacher, the parent/guardian, and finally by gaining their fully informed consent at the beginning of the interview. Children could also change their mind during the interview or refuse to take part in an activity.

This third stage of informed consent was a child-friendly consent form (Figure 17: Completed Child-friendly Consent Form) which was discussed with the child step-by-step as they filled it in. The length of the interview, the types of activities they would be involved in, and what to do if they were unhappy or worried were fully explained.

Figure 17: Completed Child-friendly Consent Form



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

The form accounted for the children's likely and actual stage of educational or cognitive development as displayed on the day of the interview. It was inclusive with flexible ways to make their marks e.g., by drawing, marking, writing or sticking. With the youngest participants aged 4 years old with limited reading and writing skills, it was important to make the form colourful, fun and predominantly pictorially based.

Children were told about the project using a variety of illustrations, filled in their age, then provided their consent with a sticker which they could choose. A range of stickers were provided to appeal to all ages from oversized animal stickers to more modest 'cool' options for the older children; interestingly, all the older children were attracted to the big stickers but made little excuses for their choice to protect their 'cool' status.

Finally, the children were asked to invent a codename for themselves in the research process, to provide them with full anonymity. This also fully engaged them in the consent process. Ethically, this was also an inclusive option as many children chose gender neutral or fluid names, taking on the name of their favourite Minion characters or superheroes as an example. A little worryingly, one young boy chose the codename of 'KillerBoy6' which he claimed was his 'computer gaming tag'. Although this flagged an alert, nothing the boy mentioned in his subsequent interviews indicated any safeguarding issues, and in fact his use of technology was heavily monitored by his mother. Reflexively, this suggests that the use of codenames allowed the children to present themselves to the researcher, in a different light. This relates to the role of the researcher where children may challenge the power being presented during the interview (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

The use of incentives was carefully considered. The children were being pulled out of their normal routine to take part in the research, but this could be considered a treat, depending on their view of school! They were offered a token of appreciation for their time and efforts, particularly because the research took place over two sessions, and to show them that their

contribution was valued. The goody bags were made up of branded merchandise from the university and age-appropriate toys and stationery. These were all approved by the Headteacher.

Another ethical consideration was the length and nature of the research interview. Children were informed of the length in their face-to-face consent process, but the length was reduced for the youngest children, those with lower stages of cognitive development, and if they became tired or bored. The average length of interview was around 35 minutes. The range of participative activities on offer was adjusted slightly according to the age of the child e.g., the doll's house furniture was not used with the junior school children aged 7 to 11. As part of the ethical process, and to support the use of participative techniques as a mechanism for children to realise their agency, children were in control of the choices of activities available to them at all times.

One popular research activity in this study, but one which carried ethical risks, was the use of the popular children's game Minecraft. To protect the children, two tablet devices were used without internet-enablement and a fresh customer account was created which was password protected. The children were observed as they used the software to create their personal spaces. They were asked beforehand in the research interview if they could use Minecraft before the option of playing the game as a participative activity was suggested. This ensured a truthful answer was obtained. The informed consent process also covered the use of a variety of participative activities including those that were technology based.

The qualitative interviews took place just before the introduction of GDPR, but the principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) were followed. Permission was asked during the triple consent process for the interviews to be filmed and recorded with an audio device for transcription and analysis purposes. Although no personal data was recorded, and codenames were used for the children, it was also important to ensure that siblings' names were also anonymised if they were mentioned during the research interview. Illuminating and ripe comments relating to family members, particularly amongst those children whose parents were divorced, were not recorded to protect the privacy of families, and their dignity.

As the two stages of qualitative research within this study sampled children, the ethics form was 'red flagged' and prepared directly for the Anglia Ruskin University Faculty Ethics Panel. The ethics code of the Market Research Society was adhered to due to the researcher's professional membership. The ethics application was approved without comments.

3.4.2.7 ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION

The qualitative data analysis process followed a step-by-step process as set out by Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp.192-198), namely:

1. Organising and preparing the qualitative data for analysis.
2. Examining the data.
3. Coding and organising the data.
4. Generating themes.
5. Writing up the narrative.

Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data analysis to handle the data in a rigorous and structured fashion (Nowell, et al., 2017) through the steps of data familiarisation, generating codes, searching for, and reviewing themes, and finally reporting on the data. The children's drawings and artworks were analysed alongside the words that they used to describe them (Carter and Ford, 2013, p. 99). NVivo, a qualitative computer software package was used to assist in coding up and analysing the data and understanding the relationship between codes.

Interpretation of the findings involved summarising the findings, comparing them to the literature and the theoretical lens of brand relationship quality theory, and discussing a view of the findings, including identifying limitations and areas for future research. It was important to acknowledge the subjectivity of qualitative research particularly when considering the approach to conducting research with children. Reflexivity was useful to assess how the research was carried out and to consider the validity of the findings.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings and discussion chapter will present the results of the two-stage qualitative research study that has taken place as outlined in the previous chapter. In Chapter 4.1, the findings of the empirical research relating to the power position and relationship between the child and the researcher is presented, which was discussed with a proposed conceptual framework in Chapter 3.1.3.3, with the associated methodology in Chapter 3.4.2.5.

Chapter 4.2 examines children's digital independence and their use of personal digital devices, their capabilities, their safety, and the physical spaces where they use the internet. Finally, in Chapter 4.3, children's digital brand relationships are analysed and discussed reviewing their brand cognisance and a conceptual framework for understanding brand drivers.

4.1 CHILDREN'S RESEARCH METHODS

As set out in Chapter 3.1.3.3, the researcher can project a number of different positions to manage the power relationship in children's qualitative research, considering either a submissive, sharing, or dominant approach. No research has considered specifically how successfully the researcher's projection of a definitive role is interpreted by the participating children. This was investigated through the addition of questioning about the role of the researcher, in the first qualitative interviews with the sampled children in this digital branding study, to test the proposed conceptual framework (Chapter 3.1.3.3; Figure 14: Conceptual Framework: The Researcher's Role in Children's Qualitative Research). The methodology for this aspect of the research is covered in Chapter 3.4.2.5.

Throughout the first stage of the qualitative interviews, the role of 'research practitioner' or in children's vernacular 'someone professional who works in an office' was actively projected. The researcher explained the purpose of the project and how the technical recording equipment worked, showing a clear difference between schoolwork and the research, which looked intriguing with the props and activities around the table. Due to ethical concerns, the research took place in an open-plan area, so it was possible to 'dress the set' and own the space. This provided a significant challenge for the interviews held in the Infant School, as a teaching assistant was (poorly) managing disruption in a nearby classroom by continuously shouting; although this was disruptive, it served to show a stark difference between the researcher's behaviour and teaching staff.

The children were asked to invent a codename as part of the informed consent process (Table 19: Participant Classification by Codename). Interestingly, half of the girls chose gender neutral or male character names (Stuart, Taylor, Jellyfish and Bob the Minion), whereas 7 out of 8 of the boys chose obviously male characters such as Spiderman, Mr Awesome, James Bond, etc. One 6-year-old boy chose 'KillerBoy6', his 'computer gaming tag'; thankfully, nothing the boy mentioned subsequently indicated safeguarding issues. Reflexively, these name choices suggest the use of codenames allowed the children to present themselves quite openly without fear of punishment, judgement, or disapproval (unlike a teacher or parent), and were perhaps (on the part of boys) trying to impress the researcher with their status or standing by taking on characteristics from their codename e.g., Mr Awesome, KillerBoy6, James Bond, Smiles, etc. This was reassuring validation to the researcher that the projection was 'on track' at the beginning of the research process.

Table 19: Participant Classification by Codename

Pair	Key Stage	Year Group	Gender	Age	Codenames
1	Foundation	Reception	Girls	4-5	Elsa 1 / Elsa 2
2	Foundation	Reception	Boys	4-5	Spiderman / Tickerman
3	1	Year 1	Girls	5-6	Stuart / Taylor
4	1	Year 2	Boys	6-7	Mr Awesome / KillerBoy6
5	2 (Lower)	Year 3	Girls	7-8	Meghan Trainor / Esme
6	2 (Lower)	Year 4	Boys	8-9	Smiles / Jim Bobby
7	2 (Higher)	Year 5	Girls	9-10	Jellyfish / Bob the Minion
8	2 (Higher)	Year 6	Boys	10-11	Jim Bob the Bear / James Bond

4.1.1 FINDINGS – RECEPTION / KEY STAGE 1

The youngest girls aged 4-6 were shy and reticent to talk. More observation took place than interview, but gentle encouragement to show interest in their contributions helped them to open up. They were most likely to ask for permission to mix modelling clay colours or participate in activities. They were tentative when testing boundaries: ‘Do we have to do whatever game you say?’ It took time to encourage the very youngest girls aged 4-5 to speak or participate by giving them ‘permission’ (Table 20: Pair 1 - Foundation Stage Girls, Age 4-5).

Researcher comments veered towards teacher-like, instructional requests such as pulling in a chair, but also nurturing and parent-like to reassure and comfort the youngest girls who initially were very shy and fearful. The role perceived by Pair 1 was a mix of grown-up and teacher.

Table 20: Pair 1 - Foundation Stage Girls, Age 4-5

Researcher: Do you want to pull in your chair a little bit so you don't fall off?			
Codename: Elsa 1	E1: Do we have to do whatever game you say? E1: What are we going to make now?	Codename: Elsa 2	E2: What shall I make now?
Gender: Girl		Gender: Girl	
Key Stage: Reception		Key Stage: Reception	
Role: Teacher		Role: Grown-up	

The second youngest pair of girls were also incredibly shy. A nurturing, supportive role was taken initially to encourage them to feel comfortable to speak (Table 21: Pair 3 - Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6). The role perception was a mix of grown-up, teacher, teaching assistant, Mum, and someone who works in an office. The projected role 'someone who works in an office' was matched, but the girls picked up on other characteristics, a level of authority or power (grown-up, teacher), but also the nurturing behaviour that was used to help them settle (teaching assistant, Mum).

Table 21: Pair 3 - Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6

Researcher: Shall I tell you how to write it [chosen codename on the consent form]? [Nods yes so interviewer spells phonetically]. R: Do you think we could help him [Zog the Alien in a projective technique exercise) and explain to him what people use the internet for?			
Codename: Stuart	I: You don't know.	Codename: Taylor	T: Um... don't know.
Gender: Girl	What about you [Stuart]?	Gender: Girl	
Key Stage: 1	S: Don't know.	Key Stage: 1	
Role: Grown-up / Mix		Role: Mix of Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Office Worker and Mum	

The youngest group of boys were not shy at all. They were cheeky and energetic. They wanted to check the camera was still working (they had been invited to help set it up initially as part of the informed consent process). Although they asked questions to check boundaries like the youngest girls 'Can we mix it [the PlayDoh]?', they felt quite confident to take part in the activities independently, 'I don't really need any help', and enjoyed playing loudly with the modelling equipment with Spiderman repeatedly making flying, fighting, and flying noises. One boy interpreted the projected role as 'teacher' so an adult authority figure, but the other thought the researcher was like God, 'who knows everything' (Table 22: Pair 2 - Foundation Stage Boys, Age 4-5). With the youngest groups, the age difference between themselves and the researcher was obviously most stark, but it is interesting that this boy perceived the difference as a knowledge gap rather than a power gap.

Table 22: Pair 2 - Foundation Stage Boys, Age 4-5

Researcher: If you look through there... and if you sit over there so we can see you through the machine. Now I want you to say, what do they say at the beginning of a film? They say ACTION don't they... so I want you to press this button here and say ACTION. [Says Action].
 R: Quick, sit down Tickerman, because it [the video camera] will wonder where you are.
 R: Spiderman, do you want to come and sit down?

Codename: Spiderman	S: I don't really need any help.	Codename: Tickerman	T: Where do I write it?
Gender: Boy	S: I have NOT got an idea.	Gender: Boy	T: Can we mix it?
Key Stage: Reception		Key Stage: Reception	
Role: Teacher		Role: God	

The boys aged 6-7 were confident and cheeky, quite the double act! One was not afraid to rib, 'You've forgotten what my [code]name is, haven't you!'. They were confident in giving instruction, such as how to spell a chosen gaming style codename 'KillerBoy6' 'without finger spaces' and repeatedly jumped up to check the video camera was still recording, but this was more about making sure the researcher had the correct information for her work, rather than demonstrating their power. In fact, this pair sought approval for things like good spelling. For this pair, there was a match between projection and perception (Table 23: Pair 4 - Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7) with both boys interpreting the role as 'office worker', or 'computer person: computer alien' (the children's translation for research practitioner).

Table 23: Pair 4 - Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7

Researcher: Okay, if you want to both sit down.
 [They are giggling after checking out the video camera]
 R: We'll do the Playdoh in a second...
 R: Shall we do some modelling?

Codename: Mr Awesome	MA: Wait, I've spelt it wrong. [Indicates behaviour where spelling would be corrected]	Codename: KillerBoy6	KB6: But there's no finger spaces. It's just like all one word.
Gender: Boy		Gender: Boy	[Telling me how to spell his codename]
Key Stage: 1		Key Stage: 1	
Role: Office Worker	MA: Can I have a silver star?	Role: Computer Person (Computer Alien)	KB6: You've forgotten what my name is, haven't you...

4.1.2 FINDINGS – KEY STAGE 2

The girls aged 7-8 were very similar to the girls aged 4-5, asking for formal instruction and permission. Both sets were the youngest classes in their respective schools (the primary school was split into an Infants and Juniors school situated in separate buildings). Transitioning to a new building may leave children questioning their place in the world. One felt able to make suggestions about the activities but was still looking for reassurance (Table

24: Pair 5 - Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8). This girl interpreted the role as teacher, whereas her peer said 'office worker' which was a match.

Table 24: Pair 5 - Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8

Researcher: So what do you think you're going to make? R: Well I'll remember that one, next time I'm wondering if my daughter is asleep and I'll see if she's using her tablet under the bed.			
Codename: Esme	E: How many colours are we allowed each? E: Maybe we could draw a person then write who it is at the top!	Codename: Meghan Trainor	M: How do I fit it on? M: How do you spell guinea pig?
Gender: Girl		Gender: Girl	
Key Stage: 2 Lower		Key Stage: 2 Lower	
Role: Teacher		Role: Office Worker	

The boys aged 7-8 were the most challenging; in fact, the researcher suspected there was a reason the teachers had used judgement sampling in this case for some respite! They lacked concentration and were constantly 'naughty'. They asked for permission but tested the boundaries of what would be acceptable by making faces at the camera and constantly rocking their chairs. The researcher was bound by the Headteacher to ensure the children did not break the school's very strict behavioural policies, and by the university ethics committee and the MRS Code of Conduct (as a professional member) to ensure the children did not come to harm. Despite repeated encouragement to take care, the boys continued to rock their chairs to the point of nearly tipping them over. Whilst adopting Mandell's least-adult approach (1998) and letting them get on with it would have been more satisfying, it was not ethical or a fit with the projected professional approach. At this point, the researcher switched tactics and adopted Mum mode using the parental trick of bribery to offer them the chance to use the tablets for a Minecraft activity if they stopped rocking their chairs (Table 25: Pair 6 - Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). This worked beautifully but their perception switched to that of a lower authority figure: 'teaching assistant' or 'baby' (because they were asked 'easy' questions about the internet). In their minds, they had exerted their power and won, although it could be said that both parties shared power by making a mutually agreeable bargain. This scenario reinforced Swain's assertions about taking 'multiple positionings' as he swayed between dominant and submissive roles (2006, p.209).

Table 25: Pair 6 - Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9

Researcher: So I might let you have a go at my computers in a minute. [J claps...]			
Codename: Smiles	S: Does that mean we can do this? [Both make noises and funny faces into the camera.]	Codename: JimBobby	J: What can we use?
Gender: Boy		Gender: Boy	
Key Stage: 2 Lower		Key Stage: 2 Lower	
Role: Baby (asking easy questions about the internet)		Role: Teaching Assistant	

The oldest children aged 10-11 had attained a different stage of cognitive and digital skills development, even correcting the researcher on digital terms, so the interviews took a different tack through the discussion guide. The researcher role was interpreted as a guide or someone with the answers to troubling questions: ‘I have a question, how old do you need to be when you use Facebook?’ Both girls and boys were facing new significant pressures such as the stress of end of primary school exams (SATs), body image, social media and messaging, online predators and bullying. These children debated the researcher’s role carefully: one girl chose a NSPCC advisor (a children’s charity) and the other a mix of teacher/teaching assistant/Mum (Table 26: Pair 7 - Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10).

Table 26: Pair 7 - Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10

Researcher: Right, so is that something you two worry about...			
Codename: Bob the Minion	B: Not really, but I have a question, how old do you need to be when you use Facebook? B: Hmm, there's another name for a tablet that's called an Android. (Corrects researcher)	Codename: Jellyfish	J: Can I go on a flat world so there's nothing on it? (Using a computer game)
Gender: Girl		Gender: Girl	
Key Stage: 2 Higher		Key Stage: 2 Higher	
Role: Someone who works for the NSPCC		Role: Mum, Teacher or Teaching Assistant	

The boys interpreted the role as teacher/teaching assistant who ‘you could talk to’, and a teacher/Mum who ‘could check on you’ (Table 27: Pair 8 - Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11). In this sense, the role of teaching assistant was not seen as a lower authority than a teacher, but as someone with more time to talk and resolve problems. The boys were particularly troubled by the pressures of the forthcoming tests at school and the digital world which reflected in their perceptions of the researcher as someone, not just in authority, but as someone who could help and share their burden.

Table 27: Pair 8 - Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11

Researcher: And how do you know if you're using YouTube what's safe to go on? R: And are you worried about some of these things that have been happening?			
Codename: JimBob the Bear	J: Where should I put that?	Codename: James Bond	JB: Dearie me, I've definitely frozen. [Quite grown-up language when game stops working]
Gender: Boy		Gender: Boy	
Key Stage: 2 Higher		Key Stage: 2 Higher	
Role: Teacher, Teaching Assistant		Role: Mum, Teacher	

4.1.3 PROJECTED ROLE

From the group of sixteen children, three identified the role adopted by the researcher, three said 'teacher', one said 'grown-up', and five said a mixture of roles including 'grown-up', 'teacher', 'teaching assistant', 'office worker' (research practitioner) and 'Mum' (Table 28: Summary of Perceived Roles). Nurturing or supportive characteristics were perceived as a 'Mum', 'children's charity worker' or 'teaching assistant'.

Table 28: Summary of Perceived Roles

Child	Key Stage	Year Group	Gender	Age	Perceived Role
1A	Foundation	Reception	Girls	4-5	Teacher
1B	Foundation	Reception	Girls	4-5	Grown-up
2A	Foundation	Reception	Boys	4-5	Teacher
2B	Foundation	Reception	Boys	4-5	God
3A	Key Stage 1	Year 1	Girls	5-6	Grown-up / Mix
3B	Key Stage 1	Year 1	Girls	5-6	Teacher / Teaching Assistant / Office Worker / Mum / Mix
4A	Key Stage 1	Year 2	Boys	6-7	Office Worker
4B	Key Stage 1	Year 2	Boys	6-7	Computer Person / Computer Alien

5A	Key Stage 2	Year 3	Girls	7-8	Teacher
5B	Key Stage 2	Year 3	Girls	7-8	Office Worker
6A	Key Stage 2	Year 4	Boys	8-9	Baby
6B	Key Stage 2	Year 4	Boys	8-9	Teaching Assistant
7A	Key Stage 2	Year 5	Girls	9-10	NSPCC Advisor
7B	Key Stage 2	Year 5	Girls	9-10	Mum / Teacher / Teaching Assistant
8A	Key Stage 2	Year 6	Boys	10-11	Teacher / Teaching Assistant
8B	Key Stage 2	Year 6	Boys	10-11	Mum / Teacher

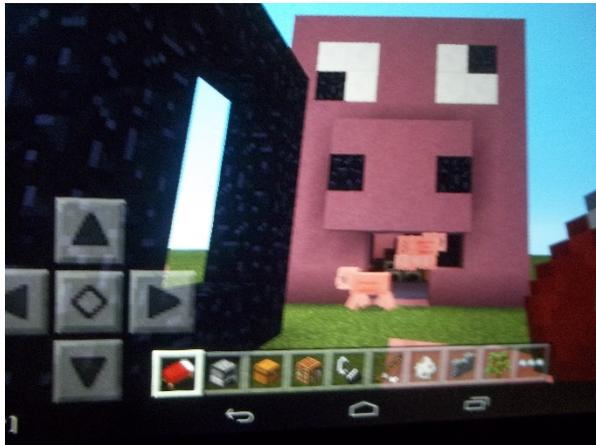
Although one boy interpreted the role as 'baby' because of the easy questions, another thought the researcher had God-like status because of high levels of knowledge. Although many picked up on teacher-like qualities, only three matched the role with a teacher but only one with a 'baby', therefore the power relationship projected was 'sharing' and not too submissive nor too dominant. Swain (2006) commented on the 'multiple positionings' taken in his research, and equally this research shows how children interpret multiple positionings and secondary definitive roles; despite the projected role, the researcher was also a full-time educator, support tutor, and Mum.

As a visitor to the school, it was expected the researcher would be treated with respect in line with the school's strict policies on discipline, but as a visitor who would be working with the children in a classroom space, the role that was projected would have a distinct impact on their perception of authority and willingness to participate in the research activities. Would the projection of the role as a 'research practitioner' allow their agency and the development of knowledge when they were also confined by the pre-existing systems of power? The boys aged 8-9 did present a challenge to the projected role. Although the researcher tried to facilitate the discussion so they could express their views unhindered, it was a delicate balancing act as they repeatedly leaned their chairs back perilously. Eventually, 'mum-mode' won, and they were given the chance to use the tablet devices once they had stopped swinging the chairs, a clear example of power play in an institutional domain.

Equally, the use of Minecraft (an electronic creative building block game) allowed the children free creative rein and the chance to display their far superior technical skills (Figure 18: Child's Representation of Personal Digital Space with Pigs). Their agency was fully realised as they recreated the place where they use their digital devices at home with the addition of spawned pigs! A creative feature of Minecraft, and one that requires some skill and learning, is the ability

to breed farm animals from blocks that will then live in the simulated world. Despite living in a semi-rural area, none of the children were from farming stock.

Figure 18: Child's Representation of Personal Digital Space with Pigs



The pig spawning was a power play. The children completed the task of creating an image of their own personal space where they use their devices, but on their own terms. This was extremely revealing; children's agency in creative and arts-based approaches is fully realised through personal access to digital devices such as smartphones and tablets. This is tempered by the finding (and ethical consideration) that older children do seem to need more support to deal with the implications of the digital world.

Projecting a consistent definitive role during qualitative research interviews with children is hard. A quarter of the participants did pick up on the projected role of office worker (research practitioner), but the nurturing characteristics used to coax the children to engage if they were shy were also picked up by six participants, and the failure to keep in role with the particularly naughty boy was also acknowledged (baby).

Overall, the projection of someone with high status or knowledge about undertaking research was matched with the children's perceptions. The research demonstrates that children can perceive a projected role and secondary roles; but researchers need to think carefully how they will manage challenges to the role before the research encounter.

The primary definitive role of office worker (research practitioner) was not the role that was required by all of the children. Both the youngest and the oldest asked for more support and advice. Others needed a firmer hand to ensure they didn't hurt themselves or contravene the school's rules. Children clearly understood the role options as presented to them on the role sheet, as they were able to choose one that fitted their perception, or select a mixture of options, and generated additional descriptors to suit their own needs, such as baby, God and alien!

4.1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK REVISITED

In this study, almost all the children viewed the researcher as someone with a high level of cognition and bearing ranging from God-like or expert down to a parent-like figure. In practice, nurturing characteristics were also employed to encourage children to participate and to

respond to their worries about growing up in a digital world making the power play appear less dominant.

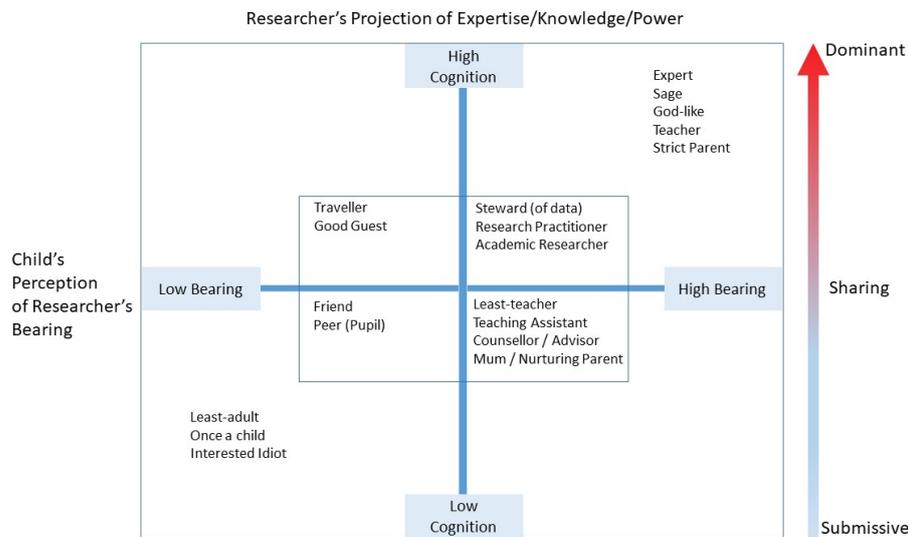
There is no single role that is most appropriate for children's research. It depends on the research objectives, range of methods, and the researcher's views on the ontological differences between the adult and the child. Indeed, a third of the children interpreted the projected role as a mixture of the options suggesting that we can be a sum of many roles - a parent-like figure, teacher, researcher, grown-up, and these secondary definitive roles are also important. Although one role may be selected and actively projected, we may still adjust our approach within the research encounter, and the projected role may need to be different according to the age and stage of the children; further research is recommended.

As Foucault says (1977), power and knowledge are connected. We cannot conduct research with children to generate knowledge without power being part of that process, particularly when conducting field research in schools. Understanding the role of power and taking a stance, from submissive to sharing to dominant, is part of the role selection process. We cannot take power out of the equation (particularly within a school environment), and we cannot dismiss membership roles from the process either. A researcher may choose not to actively project a role, but that will not stop children from perceiving the researcher in a certain way.

A conceptual framework for the position that the researcher could take in a qualitative research interview with a child to manage the power balance between the two parties, considering either a submissive, sharing, or dominant approach, was presented in the conceptual framework in Chapter 3.1.3.3, (Figure 14: Conceptual Framework: The Researcher's Role in Children's Qualitative Research). This framework sorted some of the key roles identified in the field of literature and allocated them to the power dimensions of neutral, submissive, sharing or dominant. This conceptual framework has since been revised based on the learnings of this primary research.

This can be seen in Figure 19: The Role of the Researcher: Least-Adult: Most God-like?, it consists of four quadrants based on two axes: cognition and bearing. Researchers should consider how best to project their expertise, knowledge and power; this has been labelled as the 'cognition axis' from low to high. The coloured gradient reflects the power axis as seen on the right-hand side ranging from submissive to dominant; it is proposed that high projection of expertise and knowledge relates to high power in the context of qualitative research encounters in a school environment.

Figure 19: The Role of the Researcher: Least-Adult: Most God-like?



Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

References: Least-teacher (Swain, 2006); Least-adult (Mandell, 1988); Interested Idiot (Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller, 2005); Good guest (Yee and Andrews, 2006); Steward (Allen, Mohatt, et al., 2012); Traveller (Elton-Chalcraft, 2011); Friend (Chitakunye, 2012); God-like (Greyson, 2021).

The horizontal axis moving from low to high bearing, is the child's perception of the researcher's stance, essentially the interpretation of the researcher's projected role. Many authors have written about their concerns in field over how children might be perceiving them through the way that they present themselves (Yee and Andrews, 2006; Mandell, 1988; Swain, 2006; Elton-Chalcraft, 2011; Butterworth and Murfin, 1999) and the adjustments that they made. The word 'bearing' has been chosen to try to capture the essence of their stance, through the way that the researcher moves or stands, their conduct, use of power, carriage and deportment (Oxford University Press, 2021). The central box relates to the 'sharing' dimension within each quadrant.

Some of the definitive membership roles in field research, which have been identified in Chapter 3.1.3, are subjectively allocated to the quadrants to illustrate how the researcher might present themselves to children in terms of the power relationship and how this might be interpreted or matched in their eyes.

As illustrative examples, 'least-adult' is positioned as low bearing and cognition with a submissive power stance; research practitioner sits in high bearing and cognition with a sharing power stance; and teacher in high bearing and cognition with a dominant power stance.

In the original framework, it was proposed that gender as a standpoint could be represented by 'Adult', unless there was a particular research objective or reason for a gendered approach. Following the research, 'Mum / Nurturing Parent' and 'Strict Parent' have been added to the framework. There is, of course, no reason why parents of any gender or those identifying as non-binary cannot provide the nurturing role identified by the children in this study, so this role

could be employed as a gender-neutral standpoint. There is certainly an opportunity for further research.

This new framework, based upon the outcomes of original research, offers a novel way of viewing the phenomenon of the role of the researcher in children's field research using the concepts of power, bearing and cognition. It may give confidence to novice children's researchers who are unsure of how to present themselves to their young research participants and offers other possibilities beyond acting like a child to gain valuable insight into children's worlds.

This is particularly valuable when considering methodologies with digitally native children. This study supports the growing recognition of children's increased agency as they confidently navigate the internet (often with minimal adult support, intervention or restrictions), but suggests that children lack the cognitive or emotional capacity to manage the implications of their independence in a digital world. Therefore, age and cognitive development should be acknowledged in researchers' choice of role with digital natives. This new guidance for ethnographers and moderators will add to the literature on power-relations in qualitative research in the social sciences but will also be valuable to children's researchers in other disciplines.

4.1.5 CHILD'S PLAY TECHNIQUES IN PRACTICE

Both sets of qualitative interviews involved a range of arts and creative based participative activities with children able to choose their medium for each task. As outlined in Chapter 3.4.2.5, the options provided to the participants acknowledged children's skills, interests and preferences (Carter and Ford, 2013, p.105) and included colouring, sticking, and modelling with PlayDoh, dolls house furniture, LEGO bricks or the computer game Minecraft.

All of the creative options were open to the children regardless of gender, and no judgement was made on their likelihood to be interested in a particular activity. In fact, some of the children did make their own, possibly gendered, judgements about an activity's suitability:

I: ...I don't know if you like dolls house furniture...

MA: No, no, no...

I: But I've got LEGO if you don't like dolls house furniture.

MA: Yeah, I like it. KB6: Yeah, I like... [gasps as he spots something else] Playdoh!

MA: Playdoh!

I: We can do Playdoh...

KB6: Have you got orange Playdoh?

I: I've got every colour under the rainbow.

MA: Whoa...

(Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7)

Even the very youngest children felt able to express their preference: 'I would like to do modelling' and 'Can we do whatever game we like?' (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5). The children appreciated the choices. LEGO and PlayDoh proved the most popular mediums, and all of the children were familiar with the brands. In fact, one of the boys tried to eat the PlayDoh admitting he had done it before!

JIM: I've had Play-Doh before.

I: It will make you very, very sick.

(Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9)

Despite the success of PlayDoh as a medium, it also caused some challenges. It took some time to get new dough out of the tubs (Figure 20: The Trials and Tribulations of PlayDoh). This was a good icebreaker but wasted interview time. It encouraged some of the more boisterous children to get over-excited with Spiderman turning it into a fight between two pots of PlayDoh.

TIC: I didn't know PlayDoh had this stuff on it.

SPI: I don't really need any help.

TIC: I don't need any help to open the lids.

I: I should have opened these before. How do you get PlayDoh out? Do you have to give it a squeeze?

SPI: I do not have a clue. [Bang, bang, bang].

TIC: I've got one out. Open Sesame.

[Spiderman makes banging noises, fighting noises then flying noises]

SPI: These two [pots] are having a fight.

(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5)

Figure 20: The Trials and Tribulations of PlayDoh



Preparing the PlayDoh and working it so it was mouldable would have saved time, but the children took a great deal of pleasure in the pots being brand new, just for them, and in pristine condition: 'These are my favourite colours. All of them.' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). Part of the demonstration of the power relationship involved the children asking very carefully and politely if they were allowed to mix the colours (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). The youngest groups of girls actually mixed mediums by using PlayDoh with dolls house furniture (Figure 21: Mixing Mediums - PlayDoh and Dolls House Furniture) with one girl recreating her living room carpet through a mixture of modelling clay colours (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5).

Figure 21: Mixing Mediums - PlayDoh and Dolls House Furniture



Some of the tasks, such as 'describing the internet to Zog the alien from the planet Ziggle' (Figure 22: Zog the Alien Projective Technique) or building the room in their house where they use their digital device, caused consternation for the children as they tried to match their ideas to their creative abilities: 'I normally don't do stick men but I am now,' (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8); 'I've just drawn little stick men,' (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Some children immediately claimed they couldn't do it and needed support or ideas on how to start: 'You could make the outline of your room or the furniture,' (Interviewer).

Figure 22: Zog the Alien Projective Technique



'I can't build that,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

'Argh, I can't do this,' (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9).

'But I don't know how to do some things', (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5).

In some instances, the children were limited by the modelling materials and made things they could make, rather than things that would actually help Zog to understand the internet:

I: So, what could you make for him to explain it?

E2: A fishy?

I: To show him what you'd find? [Doesn't respond]

E1: How do you even make a fish?

(Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5)

The children particularly engaged with cute Zog the alien and joined in the make-believe. When asked if they'd heard of the planet Ziggle and if they'd visited it on holiday, Tickerman responded: 'I just go to Mars on holiday!' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5), and Jellyfish said she'd heard of it somewhere 'in a different galaxy,' (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10).

Interestingly, the boys became very absorbed by the creative tasks and started humming to themselves, playing with the equipment making banging, fighting and flying noises (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5), and singing (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). Although the young girls very much enjoyed using the doll's house equipment, they didn't play make-believe with the models, and were quite focused on arranging things in the right place.

The activities were used to help the children talk about their ideas and experiences. This worked well but it was important to gauge when they had enough and needed to move on.

I: And what would you tell Zog?

SPI: Hmm. Hmm. Anyway, what did [Tickerman] say?

I: It doesn't matter what Tickerman said, it's what you think Spiderman! What do you think?

SPI: Hmm. Hmm. Hmm.

I: Is it quite a hard question?

SPI: Well, my idea is in my head, in my brain, MY BRAIN, and now my brain's blown up...

I: Your brain's blown up? We don't want that do we!

SPI: By a grenade!

I: Okay, so as your brain has blown up, shall we do a different activity?

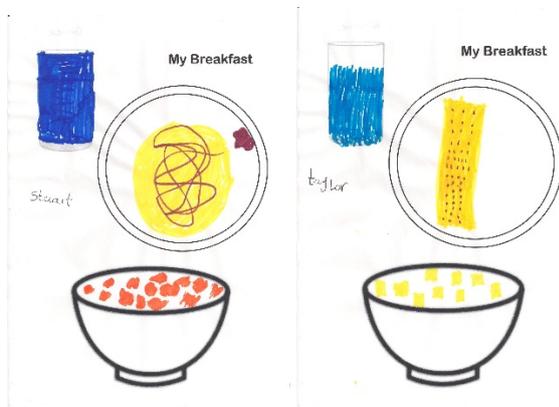
(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5).

The lure of Minecraft as a parental bribe was too much for the 'naughty' boys in Key Stage 2 and any other activity was seen as a poor substitute: 'Where's the Minecraft? That's not Minecraft, it's a house [on the sheet],' (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). The boys only calmed down and stopped squabbling between themselves when they were able to go online. Even when on Minecraft, the boys continued to be excitable and as described in Chapter 4.1.3, carried out the activities in their own way whilst spawning pigs. This was the complete opposite to the oldest boys who spent a great deal of time using Minecraft and talked extensively about

their concerns about the digital world during the process; whilst the younger boys became over-excited, the older boys relaxed and completely let down their guard.

Not all of the tasks worked effectively in stimulating discussion or encouraging the children to share their ideas visually. 'My Branded Breakfast' (Figure 23: My Branded Breakfast Projective Technique) was a drawing-based task, although some of the children did try to use PlayDoh on the paper, to encourage the children to recall the names of brands they engage with on a daily basis as part of their lived experience. Not one of the children drew packaging or logos and simply created very functional product-based breakfast plates. This could have been down to their drawing skills but was most likely because this came across as a very flat one-dimensional activity. If they had free rein to create a meal on a plastic plate, the visuals and the discussion would probably have been more insightful. The children were able to talk about breakfast brands like cereal, but this did require prompting.

Figure 23: My Branded Breakfast Projective Technique



The second task which was less successful was the brand sorting task. This used flashcards with brand logos which the children could sort into four sentiment categories: like, love, don't know and hate (Figure 24: Examples of Brands in Brand Sorting Exercise). In this exercise, the children were shown 75 brands which, on reflection, was rather excessive but seemed appropriate at the time to cover a range of product categories. It worked reasonably well in that the children could zip through with an initial sort to remove the brands they didn't know before sorting them by sentiment, but it was incredibly difficult to administer this and take note of the findings with two children doing the sort at the same time and getting bored. Good insight came from the children's general discussion on particular brands but as an exercise in a paired depth interview, this was too complicated (without moderator support).

Figure 24: Examples of Brands in Brand Sorting Exercise



The creative methods allowed children to choose activities based on their interests, but these did not always match with their skill, so there was some frustration for children who couldn't create the images in their mind with their hands. Of course, for the researcher, the value came from their discussions. The absorbing process of creating their models or pictures meant that the children spoke freely and often very entertainingly about their brand likes, dislikes, lifestyles and digital usage. The findings support previous authors in confirming that these techniques encourage children to express their ideas and opinions more easily and to realise their agency (Harden et al., 2000; Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010; Lomax, et al., 2011; Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Carter and Ford, 2013; Gillies and Robinson, 2010), but they also indicate that they help children to discuss their personal geographies (the places and spaces where they use digital devices and the digital world they enter) and to talk about issues and concerns relating to their independent digital lives. This finding adds new understanding to the existing literature on approaches to conducting children's marketing research using creative and arts-based techniques in qualitative studies.

4.2 CHILDREN'S DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE

This section of the analysis relates to the findings from the first discussion guide and looks at device ownership, digital capabilities, personal geographies, key influences and digital safety.

All of the children were able to name the devices illustrated on the consent form i.e., computer, laptop, tablet and smartphone, and all were digitally well-equipped with access to at least one internet-connected device at home. The youngest children had an equal split between having access to a family home computer and their own tablets. One of the girls had a cheaper Android tablet but Tickerman already had his own iPad and was about to receive a second-hand phone from his sister (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). Spiderman was able to access the family computer to play Purple Mash, an education game that the school subscribed to for homework (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5), and Elsa_2 had access to a computer at her Mum's house and one at her Daddy's, (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5).

While the youngest boys and girls had equal access to devices, there was a significant difference between genders for the Key Stage 1 children. Both of the girls had access to tablets. Taylor shared hers with her sister and Stuart had her own device. She also had a computer in the house but wasn't allowed on it, 'My Mummy doesn't let me go on hers,' (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6). Mr Awesome was a gamer and had access to a multitude of devices although he considered this a limited range: 'I only have a DS, a 3DS, a PSP, a Wii and an Xbox 360' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). He shared access to the Wii and Xbox with his family, but the rest were his own. Interestingly, as Mr Awesome discussed his devices, KillerBoy6 kept interjecting with additional devices; there was certainly some competition between the two boys.

...KB6: 'I have an iPhone.'

...KB6: 'I have an iPad, a phone and a MP4 player.'

...KB6: 'I have a Wii as well.'

(Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7)

The younger junior school pairs also demonstrated a difference in device ownership between the genders. Both Esme and Meghan Trainor had access to family laptops, and Esme had an iPad that she had received at Christmas (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8). Jim Bobby had an Xbox, a Wii, a tablet and an iPhone which he could text and FaceTime on, whereas Smiles had a PS4, tablet, computer and access to a phone. He tried to claim he had a phone, but Jim Bobby quickly retorted: 'You haven't got your own phone!', (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9).

With the older junior school pairs, device ownership followed a similarly gendered theme with the girls having access to family computers and tablets (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Jellyfish and her older sister both had a phone, and she was waiting for an upgrade as her Mum was passing down her old device. James Bond tended to use his tablet, a phone for emergencies and an iPod for his music. Jim Bob the Bear had a tablet and an Xbox which he used to access the internet. He wasn't allowed a phone because of things that had been happening at the local senior school, '...people like taking a picture of their private parts and they've been sending it to other people!' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

4.2.1 DEVICE INHERITANCE

The children all talked about sharing devices as a family although laptops or computers were often designated for parents to use for work. Tablets appeared to be special presents bought for birthdays and Christmas brand new. The only digital device that appeared to be passed through parents and siblings were smartphones. Tickerman, in the youngest group, talked about how excited he was to receive a phone soon, 'my sister's going to get a new phone and I'm having my sister's phone' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). Jellyfish was also eagerly awaiting a newer model of the iPhone from her Mum as she was due an upgrade, (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Phone upgrades from the top-down leads to a cascade of swaps with the timing of the phone contract seemingly more of a spur than the child's actual need or development. Tickerman certainly didn't think it was surprising or unusual that he would be allowed to have a phone of his own. Interestingly, hand-me downs seem to have a better cachet when it comes to digital devices compared to the slightly rusty bikes and threadbare sweaters of old.

Although children are gaining access to smartphone devices, they are not necessarily connected to a data network with a contract. Jellyfish had a pay-as-you-go contract which meant she could make calls to her friends or use the wi-fi for messaging. Tickerman didn't have any real understanding of the issue.

4.2.2 DIGITAL CAPABILITIES

Although the children appeared to be quite confident using computers, laptops, tablets and some gaming consoles, they had limited technical understanding. The younger children didn't have any understanding of an app but did relate to icons representing games that they wanted to play (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6; Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5):

I: So, do you know what these are on the iPhone?

JIM: Thingies.

SMI: Apps.

JIM: Apps, yeah.

I: Apps. And what's an app?

JIM: It's err...

SMI: A thing that you click on and something pops up [laughs].

I: What something? What would pop up?

SMI: An image. No, the game or... whatever it's meant to be.

JIM: The game.

(Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9)

The concept of the internet was quite tricky for them to explain to Zog, the visiting green alien. Spiderman was adamant that, 'I have NOT got an idea,' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5) but Tickerman was convinced it was on the computer. KillerBoy6 and Mr Awesome confidently modelled laptops and pictures of video games to help explain where to find it (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

The concept of searching for things was easier to understand for most. Taylor explained that 'like people go on it to see stuff,' (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6). Elsa_2 had found pictures on the internet with her Daddy, 'Once my Daddy let me type down some things that I can have a look at and once I typed down castle and Bambi,' (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5). Elsa_1 had picked up on the commercial potential of the internet, 'You look on the website, to find some things, and when you find something, somebody orders it, and somebody brings it to you,' (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5). She explained how it was possible to buy pets on the internet too, 'You look for pets. You order them. And then they bring them in a box'. It's unclear what had brought her to this conclusion, but it isn't possible in the UK.

The junior school children had clearer ideas of the value of the internet for, 'finding out about stuff and places and how much stuff is,' and looking up, 'how to make pancakes' or other recipes (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8). Many of the children talked about searching for things they were interested in online. The boys in particular used their internet-enabled game consoles as the access point. KillerBoy6 loved alien research and believed they were alive after seeing a clip about them, 'Fire aliens and grass aliens. And they all have a battle,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). The boys also had strategies for search, 'Just search it up on either Wikipedia or Google,' (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9).

The older junior school children had more technical knowledge, 'the internet is where you can search for things, so the internet is like travelled by electricity, it goes through wires, and it connects to the network on your tablet or your computer or your phone and yeah,' (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). The older boys could describe the concept of apps and how they could be mini games or helpful tools like calculators. As well as understanding the value and uses of the internet and browsers like Google, they were also more cognisant of the wider impact of their search behaviour, 'um, so people should use the internet to help them with homework and work and other work-related things because there's no good going on the internet and searching rude images or inappropriate things because that's not fair on other people around the world,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

The children's digital capabilities stretched to using digital devices to help them explore their own hobbies and interests. Meghan Trainor wanted to learn how to play her keyboard, so she

typed in 'piano lessons online' on YouTube and was now teaching herself successfully (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8). Jellyfish liked to watch beauty vlogger Zoella and copy her make-up tutorials (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10), and James Bond demonstrated his superior Minecraft skills during the interview by building a glass ceiling and a special chair that he had learnt how to do via a YouTube tutorial (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11). Smiles and Jim Bobby were confident using the internet to search for game cheats so they could get to the next level, this often involved checking a gaming blogger's page to find the cheat codes (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9); they were using quite sophisticated searching to find the right information and interpret it but were clearly accessing adult sites without judging the legitimacy of the page (these cheat codes could potentially be viruses).

These boys also talked about their ability to use multiple devices at once. Smiles was, 'usually watching TV at the same time. If I'm on the computer, I'm watching YouTube at the same time. If I'm on the tablet, I'm on the TV,' (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). When asked how they managed to concentrate, they explained they dual screened by balancing the layer of noises and stimulation and paying attention to one device more than the other.

SMI: It's easy. It's just because I play the game more than I watch TV. The TV's like the background which I hear and see at the same time. I'm like looking at that and looking at you.

JIM: I'm kind of like a crab. I can look in front of me at the same time as... I'm like looking at the tablet screen but I'm looking in front of me at the same time. I can see the TV as well.

(Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9)

This skill seems to be one that takes time to build. The boys in the Foundation class were still apprentices:

I: [Boys are busy building]. When you are using the computer in your rooms, in your house, are you doing anything else at the same time? [Silence] Are you watching TV at the same time?

TIC: I sometimes do that.

SPI: I can't do that.

TIC: I can.

SPI: It's impossible!

TIC: It's not impossible for me!

SPI: It's hard for me!

TIC: It's not impossible for me!

(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5)

4.2.3 GAMING

Gaming was a huge area of interest for the children but there were specific gender differences in how the children accessed games and the type and nature of game play. The boys were most likely to access games via a console and the girls via tablets. Taylor enjoyed puzzle matching games and a driving game on her tablet where the device was moved to make the car steer (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6).

Both of the youngest boys enjoyed fun, educational games on CBeebies (available on the website and an app) including a pet care game, 'We feed the rat sometimes and we play with it sometimes and if he's too full, he's got a speech bubble out of his head with a core, a carrot and letters and a cross [CBeebies, My Pet and Me - it's a hamster],' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5).

The youngest boys really enjoyed playing on the Wii, Spiderman loved a triple branded game 'Wii LEGO Star Wars where he had to, 'defeat bad guys,' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5) but with the Wii running via the television, game play was not always possible, 'when Daddy's watching the cricket'.

Tickerman was looking forward to playing games on his new phone such as the 'running thing where something chases you just out of a cave and we jump over stuff,' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). He couldn't recall the brand name of the game but was able to describe it very clearly. KillerBoy6 enjoyed playing branded games on his consoles with his favourite three all relating to film / toy franchises, Big Hero 6, Ninja Turtles and the LEGO Movie (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

Smiles enjoyed building games like Minecraft particularly with that style of 'retro' graphic (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9) and indeed this passion for Minecraft extended to the older boys who found it relaxing and a good way to bond with friends when they shared access to worlds.

4.2.4 PERSONAL GEOGRAPHIES

The children were asked to create the space in their house where they most often use their digital devices. All of the youngest children modelled their spaces on the sitting room at the heart of the family with their parents present. Tickerman explained that his Mum or Dad might be cooking tea while he was on the sofa playing with his devices (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). When Elsa_2 designed her digital space using dolls house furniture, she chose to represent her Mum's house but still added Dad to the family scene using dolls (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5).

The Key Stage 1 children all reported that they could use their devices in the living room or bedroom, and normally retreated upstairs if it was too noisy (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6; Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). Taylor explained how if she was in the living room, her Mum might say, 'don't go on your tablet because you go on it too much,' (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6).

The junior school children appeared to have more freedom to move around the house. The younger boys explained that they didn't have to sit in the same room as their Mum and Dad, and Smiles had access to a TV room (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). Esme could use her device all over the house from the front room to bedroom, but Meghan Trainor tended to use the living room to avoid her brother who would pinch her device (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8).

The older girls tended to use their bedroom as a first choice (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10) whereas James Bond decided tactically where to use his device, either upstairs if his Mum wanted to watch adult programmes on TV, or the lounge to get close to the Wi-Fi (challenging

internet connections was a resounding theme for all of the children who lived in the surrounding villages). Jim Bob would choose his living room or his 'gaming room' where he kept his Xbox depending on which device he wanted to use (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11). This analysis shows very clearly that supervision is very present for the children aged 4-5 but quickly relaxes with the Key Stage 1 children able to use their bedroom with some restrictions on time. By junior school, the children were able to use any space in the house they wanted, but this was often tactical based on noise, choice of device, siblings, or wi-fi connection.

4.2.4.1 INDEPENDENT USE

All of the children in Key Stage 1 upwards were allowed to use their devices upstairs in their bedroom. Access was restricted at certain times e.g., when getting ready for school or if they had been on too long, but was not always supervised, although support was on hand. Tickerman would get help from his sister and Mum to access CBeebies while he was in the living area then his Mum would often cook while he was using the computer (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5).

Taylor explained that she was allowed to search for things on her tablet herself e.g., if she wanted to find a video on YouTube, but Stuart always had to ask her Mum for help. Both girls got to choose the games that they wanted on the tablet showing independent brand choices. Stuart had to ask her parents to download games and was only able to use the internet when they were in the room, but Taylor explained how she was able to gain access to games herself:

I: Oh right, so you've got to wait until Daddy pays the money for it [nods]. And do you have to ask before you download a game, or can you do it yourself?

TAY: I do it myself but if it's money I ask.

I: Oh right, so if it's free you can download them.

TAY: Yes.

(Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6)

Despite this loose supervision, the children were using tools on their devices without really understanding what they were doing. Both of the youngest boys had been messaging on their DS games consoles, 'I just write hello on every single one I sended [sic],' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5).

Mr Awesome enjoyed more freedom over game playing because his Mum had a strategy in place. She bought all of his games and consoles and pre-checked them to make sure they were suitable (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

KillerBoy6 was very keen to have independent use of his devices particularly because he wanted to use them to keep in touch with his Dad and maintain their relationship (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). Some of the contradictions in his behaviour and comments could be down to the difference between his Mum and Dad's parenting styles who appeared to have very different attitudes towards gaming and safety. He explained that if he played his games without asking at his Mum's she would 'beat me to death,' but after a raised eyebrow, he revised this, 'Well, not actually beat me to death. She would just ground me. But my Dad

doesn't'. He stated, 'I don't have to ask when I'm with my Dad. I can just get on Skylanders... my Dad just lets me play anything I want,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

By junior school, the children appear to be enjoying more independent use of digital devices. Jim Bobby was allowed to text and FaceTime independently and liked being able to FaceTime his Dad and uncle at work (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). Both boy in the pair appeared to enjoy significant freedom to use the internet and 'just download apps and delete apps'; Smiles in particular spent a lot of time checking out the reviews of apps and downloading them.

Meghan Trainor was generally trusted to behave responsibly and would watch keyboard tutorials alone; her Mum could hear the piano but wouldn't need to check on her. She explained that her parents would check to see if she'd found the right website, 'but normally I'm fine'. (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8). Esme, however, was abusing the trust her parents had granted her by 'secretly' using her iPad in bed when she was supposed to be asleep, 'I sometimes do it under the quilt and then if someone was coming, I normally put the cover on and hide it under and look like I'm sleeping'.

Jellyfish was the only child who had a phone contract with a pay-as-you-go top up every month. She would use up that £10 within a week by making phone calls and texting from her bedroom (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10).

The older boys were allowed to play in their rooms with their devices but James Bond who was an only child with a single mother would often get lonely playing Minecraft, so would ask his Mum to leave the television on, 'so it sounds like I've got a bit of company as well,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

4.2.5 INFLUENCES

This following section looks at a range of influences on children's digital behaviours identified in the depth interviews relating to household composition, siblings, friends and vloggers.

4.2.5.1 SPLIT HOUSEHOLDS

Three of the children in the depth interviews had divorced parents. Elsa_2 (age 4-5), KillerBoy6 (age 6-7) and James Bond (age 10-11). Elsa_2 had access to computers at both houses but when asked to create her digital space at home still included a representation of her Dad with a doll and drew her Dad on her house worksheet. At that point in time, she had similar set ups in both houses but didn't see a distinction between the two spaces.

KillerBoy6 experienced significant differences in the rules around digital and gaming use with his Mum appearing to be very strict and concerned about safety protocols and wasting electricity, but his Dad letting him play 'anything I want'. Mr Awesome had to ask to play Skylanders as it was 'quite scary', but KillerBoy6 said he just 'puts it on,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

James Bond talked of loneliness when using digital devices as he just lives 'with my Mum and my Dog'. His Dad was not in his life and his Mum often had jobs to do around the house.

4.2.5.2 SIBLING PLAY

Sibling socialisation was key to many of the children's digital lives. Tickerman enjoyed playing 'Flappy Bird' [misreferring to Angry Birds] with both of his sisters. They shared the mission to get past the 'sharp bit,' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). Taylor also played frequently on her tablet alongside her sister who had a similar device (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6). KillerBoy6 had access to his sister's games on her iPad and they played together frequently or Facetimed friends that they had met on holiday or their Dad (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7).

Although Mr Awesome thought that boys tend to play more video games than girls, KillerBoy6 didn't agree explaining that he could play on his sister's world in Minecraft whenever he wanted, and she had even set up a profile for him (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). He particularly enjoyed being able to continue their play even when she was at their Nan's house, 'Like if my sister's at my Nan's and I'm at my house and I go on her world I just connect to her world and I can see, and we can talk when we're in completely different towns'.

Many of the children had collaborated with their siblings to learn new skills. Jellyfish had a phone like her big sister and had taught her little brother how to text his name (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Tickerman had learnt that you can play games on a phone by watching his big sister (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5), and Esme and her brother had been involved in filming a YouTube video for the local narrow gauge railway attraction which was a family hobby (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8).

Siblings could also be just plain annoying both in the real and virtual worlds. Meghan Trainor explained how her brother was always just lying around being lazy when she was using her tablet (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8); Bob the Minion had to censure her tablet use as her little sister often wanted to watch Peppa Pig on it, when she was allowed to watch 12 rating films with her Mum on the same device (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10); and Jim Bob's brother destroyed his whole tree house on Minecraft by connecting to his world and burning it down (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

Siblings could also tell a cautionary tale. Jellyfish had learnt about internet safety early on as her big sister was approached by a paedophile on social media and her Dad discovered it was a 50-year-old man. Jellyfish knew it was important to have a private profile on social media from her sister's experience (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10).

4.2.5.3 FRIENDS

The boys were most likely to talk of friends as an influence for their digital behaviour and this was essentially because of gaming and the ability to play games virtually with friends by entering the same worlds. There appeared to be a lot of pressure to play particular games, some of which might be scary or violent. Jim Bobby (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9) explained that he liked, 'every game that my friends play'.

The older girls were drawn into online social contact because of the desire to stay in touch with their friends. Jellyfish texted her friends as soon as she got home from school, particularly if something funny happened (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Meghan Trainor's family

was from South Africa, so she set up a Facebook page when she was 7 to keep in touch with her cousins and friends (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8).

Jim Bob had a complicated relationship with the online and offline world. He enjoyed catching up with his friends from school and his gymnastics club on the Xbox but 'freaked out' about 'random friend requests' and recommendations to play violent computer games. He struggled with the peer pressure to get a phone and thought that many of his friends who claimed to have one were trying to be 'big and bold'. As he lived in a village across the road from the park, he couldn't see the need for a phone at the moment (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

4.2.5.4 VLOGGERS

Vloggers also appeared to be a key influence for boys and girls, with very gendered interests. Gaming tutorials on YouTube were very popular with the junior schoolboys. James Bond built a glass ceiling and special chair (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11) by watching people make it online. The older boys located relevant YouTubers by using the search tab in the channel. A particular favourite, Stampy, had 6 million subscribers. This told the boys that he was 'popular and successful'. They thought that he made the videos because he enjoyed doing it and 'seeing what his fans like because he has a load of messages'. They felt he 'does it for his people really' and did not mention any commercial intent or monetisation. Some of the tutorials were not for their age group and they had been careful to follow a YouTuber that did tutorials for GTA (a game with various age ratings) on the 'races', rather than 'any of the killing,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

General interest vloggers were also popular, such as a YouTuber who did a vlog about what kind of superpower he would have (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9), and Zoella's beauty tutorials (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Jellyfish enjoyed watching her because other people were boring with 'really, really, really, long boring videos'. Jellyfish had found other popular vloggers by looking at Zoella's recommendations 'on an advert'. Bob the Minion enjoyed watching family vloggers like Working with the Lemons who sing and make music video covers (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10).

4.2.6 SAFETY

The youngest children had emerging ideas about computer and internet safety. Tickerman thought that he used the computer very safely because 'I don't put water on it. I dry my hands when I'm going to the toilet,' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). He also had some great internet safety advice, 'don't do stuff with other people around the world'. The girls were also very confident about computer safety, 'You mustn't fall off your seat when you're using the computer,' (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5). They also knew that passwords were private and shouldn't be shared, if someone found it, you would 'get told off,' (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5).

The children in Key Stage 1 appeared to be aware of the dangers of the internet and content they might access. KillerBoy6 and Mr Awesome thought that if you listened to videos online with a naughty word, you could 'just turn it down,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). Mr Awesome had free access to his DS because his Mum had purchased all his games and vetted them (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7), however he did have unfettered access to

the messaging system on the DS saying he didn't know who the messages were going to, but 'no one's ever sent anything to me'.

These two boys were keen to be safe, but they were slipping up. Mr Awesome said that he would 'normally just type in stuff that I've seen before so then I know if it's safe,' on YouTube, of course, this isn't a guarantee of safety and innocuous keywords can be used to tag inappropriate content. KillerBoy6 was desperate for his Mum to download a safety app onto his devices so he could have better access to videos and stated that the internet was 'not safe' for children. However, he then proceeded to explain how he had recently seen a scary Teletubbies edited video that looks like a Teletubby erupting from the screen 'at his girlfriend's house' so the lure of a viral video was obviously too much!

The danger of predators had clearly been drummed into all of the children. The Key Stage 1 boys knew it could be dangerous to invite someone around who you had met on the internet, 'they might not be good or bad, they could be lying,' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7); Meghan Trainor knew that 'sending selfies' could be dangerous as 'the person would keep on sending it and they'd find the house' (Pair 5, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 7-8); and Jellyfish was used to her Mum checking her browser history to make sure she was safe after her sister's experience (Pair 7, Key Stage 2 Girls, Age 9-10). Even Taylor had an emerging idea of online stranger danger saying, 'if something comes up like a cute rabbit and you press okay, and more stuff starts to come up then you need to ask your Dad or your Mum'. When asked what it could be, she thought 'a little stranger,' (Pair 3, Key Stage 1 Girls, Age 5-6).

Although the junior school children had clearly been lectured on sending inappropriate photos following the problem at the senior school, James Bond was quite pragmatic about internet safety, 'I kind of just watch the things that are suitable for me and I know that some games are, and some games aren't,' and he didn't use social media 'because I don't really want to get like bad comments or anything like that,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

Although both of the older boys had worries, they thought that parents and teachers constantly talked about the bad stuff and paedophiles. Jim Bob said, 'it's not fair just making the whole world sound like it's a dangerous place because you can have fun whilst doing other things'. They recommended teachers and parents telling them just to 'be careful and have fun'.

4.2.6.1 GAMING SAFETY

The gamers appeared to be exposed to different challenges in terms of safety and this affected the boys only in this study.

KillerBoy6 loved the feature of Minecraft that allowed him to enter the same world with his sister and talk to her online, but he was frustrated by Herobrine, 'Yeah, he's a weird guy who's just on Minecraft and he keeps breaking my blocks down. He keeps breaking the snow when I'm on a snow world. And he breaks my chests. He makes my chests disappear. I'm like, where the heck is my chest?' (Pair 4, Key Stage 1 Boys, Age 6-7). It was unclear if Herobrine was a game feature, or someone real (in a virtual form) visiting the same world.

Smiles and Jim Bobby both used the internet to find cheat codes from gamers so they could get to the next level quicker and easier without any real sense of whether the codes were viruses or not, or who was using the sites (Pair 6, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 8-9). They also

referred to games that are not targeting children. James Bond and Jim Bob, who were close to moving to a new school, were aware that some games were suitable for them, and some weren't, describing GTA as, 'another level of bad' with drugs and killing in it (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11). Many of their friends were playing games in the higher age bracket and they both felt that pressure to play or be left out.

Jim Bob explained that Minecraft could be played using Wi-Fi and servers, 'when I went skiing in France, a load of kids had their tablets, and they were all playing Minecraft and there was about 15 of them on a server... And then all of a sudden, I accidentally joined their world and yeah, they were just all running about over the rooftops. They were each destroying everything,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11). He also talked about Hunger Games, 'where you fight people on the server, and you can win battles and you win money'. James Bond explained that he would 'acknowledge' these people then get on with playing his game. Jim Bob explained that he had made the choice to be able to play with his friends, but the downside was that he was really worried about random friend requests, 'I get worried because I don't know what to do because I worry about it in the situation,' (Pair 8, Key Stage 2 Boys, Age 10-11).

It is clear that boys face quite different safety concerns compared to girls (or non-gamers) and that brands are not necessarily doing enough to stop younger children gaining access to age-restricted games or protecting children using open servers.

4.2.6 SUMMARY

It appears that through a mix of cognitive development and socialisation, children are building their digital capabilities and understanding of the digital world. The youngest children had a very functional concept of internet safety relating to sitting still with dry hands, which built by the end of junior school to self-awareness, with children cognisant of how their actions could affect other people e.g., by sharing photos, destroying people's worlds, placing peer pressure on a friend.

From Key Stage 1, children are using digital devices independently and with minimal supervision. They are often using them in their bedrooms, and some children are breaking parental rules about usage. This reinforces the extrapolated statistics discussed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 2.4.5 relating to children taking their device to bed and using them independently. Device inheritance for smartphones is leading to children gaining access to a (at the least, wi-fi enabled phone) at a much younger age as parents cascade old handsets down the family chain. The youngest children are not cognisant of the mechanisms of messaging systems although they do understand FaceTime. Sibling socialisation is another way that children become more digitally active and independent at a younger age. Older siblings are teaching their younger brothers and sisters how to text or use different computer games or apps.

Children are very aware of online predators because of their internet safety lessons at school, however, these warnings are very general and only relate to a small number of issues that might occur. Children appear to have much less understanding of commercial intent (vloggers), data capture, or how viruses can be spread across devices (copying and pasting cheat codes). Their interest in branded computer games leads them to search for related

gaming tutorials on YouTube or use specific keywords which could open them up to malicious content (using keywords to disguise inappropriate content). The use of web servers and children able to access age-inappropriate games are additional concerns.

This chapter has therefore identified that there are gender differences in the independence of digital behaviour and boys' increasingly agentic behaviour is putting them at risk as they engage with computer game brands. There is also an indicator that children whose parents are apart may be more at risk because of diverging rules and boundaries between separated partners.

4.3 CHILDREN'S DIGITAL BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

This section of the analysis will examine some of the brand related comments that were raised in the first discussion and the brand sorting task and associated conversations that took place in the second discussion.

4.3.1 BRAND COGNISANCE

This sub-section breaks down the results by educational key stage looking at the youngest children aged 4-5 in the Reception Stage, followed by the Key Stage 1 children aged 5-7, and finally the children in the junior school at Key Stage 2, aged 7-11.

4.3.1.1 RECEPTION STAGE

The youngest girls spoke about their 'branded breakfast' in terms of functional items like 'toast' and 'butter', but they were eventually drawn to mention Cheerios cereal, a character-based yoghurt brand and that they liked to watch CBeebies or Disney Channel with their breakfast. These brands were certainly not top of mind when the activity began (Pair 1, Foundation Girls, Age 4-5). They took great care over the brand sorting task and examined every picture card carefully using their early reading skills to phonically sound out the words (phonic is a system of reading in the UK); 'Elsa_2: A Rrr Gg oh ss? What does that say? I: Argos'. If they couldn't visually identify the logo or phonically sound the word, they would ask and check which sometimes was an additional trigger. There were some amusing errors, 'Elsa_1: Dinosaur? I: Dairylea' and 'I like apples,' (the fruit not the brand). The girls instantly started spotting logos that they visually recognised and matching them to product categories, 'I've seen that somewhere [Subway]. It's a food order,' and 'That's toilet roll (Andrex)'. They became incredibly excited when they spotted a brand that had a personal connection, 'Elsa_2: Adidas? I've heard of that before. On trainers,' and 'Elsa_1: Xbox. My brother has an Xbox. CBeebies! Minecraft!' Elsa_1 was particularly thrilled to see Xbox and Talking Tom, a talking cat game. It reminded her of getting a tablet for her birthday and finding the sister game, Talking Angela online and downloading it. This demonstrates that these brands were in their lived experience, everyday food at the breakfast table, games belonging to a brother and TV channels / apps, but also how that everyday brand set extends, brand by brand.

Figure 25: Brand Sorting Task with Foundation Stage Pupil



In the second brand sort by sentiment (Figure 25: Brand Sorting Task with Foundation Stage Pupil), the girls were easily able to identify brands that they loved but had few negative feelings towards brands, the category for 'liked' was for brands that they didn't really know but thought they might have recognised and had no strong feelings about. Elsa_1 disliked Nike but couldn't say why. When explaining their 'love' brands, Elsa_1 used naming conventions, 'that's on telly, that's on water'. Some brands had more personal connections, 'My brother plays Minecraft, PlayDoh is what I play with, BBC is what I watch with my Dad'. Elsa_2 had similar responses, 'You can play with PlayDoh, and I like PlayDoh.' The girls had a strong preference for food brands, as well as toys like Baby Annabel, Baby Born, Barbie, Sylvanian Families, PlayDoh, Hello Kitty and LEGO; TV channels like BBC, CBeebies, Disney; and games and apps like Minecraft, Talking Tom, Angry Birds, Wii and Xbox. Elsa_2 also mentioned Moshi Monsters as a favourite brand that she chose on her yoghurt and clothes. Although the girls recognised a good number of brands, this was purely based on visual recognition and some brand names from their lived experience, and they found it very difficult to articulate more detail beyond naming product categories and associations to family members. They were able to explain that they had seen brands in the supermarket or on the television, but not where on the television e.g., programming or commercials. Even with probing, they did not seem to understand the concept of ads between TV programmes and changed the subject back to their drawings.

The youngest boys equally struggled to name all of the brands used every day, 'Tickerman: I think it's called cereal circles because it's cereal and it looks like circles. I have Frosties with them sometimes' (Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5). Spiderman remembered that he had Rice Krispies but couldn't remember the name of his purple medicine [Calpol] and when probed, had no concept of brands of white bread. They were both very aware of the supermarket Tesco, where they would have done their weekly shop with their parents.

They were both fans of breakfast cereal and talked about other brands they liked such as Sugar Puffs, Rice Krispies and Coco Pops. This brought them onto a newer brand called Coco Crocs that they'd seen on television with chocolate cereal crocodiles. Spiderman had picked up on an important product cue, 'Any cereals that begin Coco Pops are chocolate cereals,' and Tickerman was really impressed that the words rhyme so you could remember them: Coco Pops, Coco Crocs.

The boys were very confident on the brand sort and flew through the first sort to reject any that they had never seen or heard of. They found a number of brands that they had definitely seen but couldn't place. For the boys, 'like' was 'I've seen it but have no strong feelings about it'. They didn't try to sound out any words like the girls but focused on visual cues. The boys appeared to be more advanced than the girls in their brand knowledge making references to personal associations for many of the brands they discussed:

T: [Robinson's] I think I have seen that. I have, at a zoo.

T: [Nike] I do golf and I have gloves like this! I really love golf [and put the brand in Love].

T: I really, really have seen Minecraft. I've got it. I've got 3 games on Minecraft.

S: Yeah, Minecraft. I definitely have seen Minecraft because I've made 4 different worlds.

T: Yes, I have been to Disneyland.

(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5)

Tickerman gave an example of brand dissonance putting Apple in the hate pile because his iPad wasn't working at the moment. Both boys became very passionate about games and toys that they really love such as LEGO, Angry Birds, Minecraft and the Wii. Spiderman also expressed a desire to build a brand relationship with Nerf. He didn't have a Nerf gun but really wanted one, 'I can't play this [Nerf] but I want to... I want to go to a Nerf wars party'. Interestingly, as pre/early readers, Tickerman had renamed one of his favourite brands as he didn't know the actual name, but he was corrected by Spiderman.

I: What's this one? [Angry Birds]

T: Flappy Birds. I've got a game of it.

S: It's not Flappy Birds. It's Angry Birds. This is how angry the angry birds are [does an angry face]

(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5)

Another communication fail for early readers was the retail brand Boots which sells toiletries and cosmetics, but the word has many meanings of much closer relevance to a 5-year-old as can be seen here:

S: I like Boots, they're pretty helpful.

I: If you go into the shop?

S: No if you're going camping.

I: Boots on your feet?

S: No, boots in the car. They're pretty helpful [for luggage]

(Pair 2, Foundation Boys, Age 4-5)

The boys were not really interested in the subject of advertising and could only comment that it was, 'really annoying because they stop you from seeing [television programmes]'.

In the second brand sort by sentiment, the boys had a strong preference for games, channels and apps like Angry Birds, Wii, Minecraft, Disney and Netflix; food brands like Doritos and McDonalds; toys like NERF and LEGO; and sports brands like Nike. They disliked Fairy, girly toys like Hello Kitty and Baby Annabel, and Apple for the broken iPad. They had strong associations to game brands that they had used and played with online.

4.3.1.2 KEY STAGE 1

The girls in Key Stage 1 did not mention any brands names when discussing their breakfast choices. They did discuss television channels that they watched at breakfast time naming Disney Channel and Cartoon Network. Stuart was also keen on watching Masterchef, a cooking competition. The girls were able to do the brand sort very quickly. The girls were much quicker to hate a brand than the previous two groups, with Stuart removing quite a few food brands that she didn't like. Neither girl liked Angry Birds because it was boring. Taylor was able to identify quite a few brands such as BT, Apple, Fairy, EE, and Birds Eye that her Mummy used. The girls were very keen on Playmobil and LEGO and had been purchased gift sets for their birthdays. They were also able to link LEGO to crossover products like computer games that Stuart had played with her Dad.

Both girls were able to give a little rationale for their brand choices, even explaining why they liked one variant of M&Ms over another, 'I don't like the nut ones, but I just like the chocolate ones inside'. Stuart was able to recall a trip she made with her family to Cadbury World where they made chocolate, and this had provided her with a positive association with the brand placing it in the 'love' category. Surprisingly, the cleaning product Fairy had a positive review, with Taylor explaining how she liked washing her hands and the plates and putting them away. Stuart was able to provide a rationale for loving Colgate toothpaste, 'It's nice for your teeth, and my Mummy uses that and so does my Daddy. And it gets our teeth nice and white sometimes'.

Neither of the girls were interested in advertising seeing it as an interruption to television programming but they understood the concept of television adverts. They showed no interest in discussing this topic.

With the sentiment brand sort, the girls were keen on shops like Argos; game brands like Minecraft, Talking Tom; TV channels/apps like Milkshake, CBBC, CBeebies, Disney, BBC, and YouTube; food brands like Cadbury, Coca-Cola, Haribo, KitKat, M&Ms, McDonald's, Pringles, and Birds Eye; toy brands like LEGO, Playmobil, Sylvanian Families, Baby Born, and Play-Doh; and household brands like Colgate, Fairy and Sony. They disliked quite a few brands including: Amazon, Angry Birds, Apple, Facebook, Wii, and a range of food brands. This pairing were the most stereotypically girly liking dolls more than games, so the dislikes are not as surprising compared to the children in the other pairs. Brand associations were stronger than with the youngest children and some reasons for liking or disliking a brand could be provided.

The boys in Key Stage 1 were equally quite generic in their discussion of breakfast items apart from the cereal brand, Cheerios. When asked about cereal adverts, KillerBoy6 explained that

he liked science adverts with experiments, and he always asked his Mum to buy him anything that mentioned dinosaurs as he wanted to be a palaeontologist when he was older – a big word for a 6-year-old! Mr Awesome liked to watch adverts with new toys, particularly ninjas; he referred to an ad he'd seen recently for a NERF gun and described it in fine detail, demonstrating really strong recall.

KillerBoy6 explained that he only liked to play with toys that he had seen programmes about or played games about, so anything with a franchise or licensing arrangement.

Both boys were hyper during their brand sort and did this very quickly, rejecting brands with quite strong reactions, 'baby stuff, I'm not looking at that [Pampers]'. They liked TV channels where they could make associations to favourite programmes like Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. Mr Awesome hated IKEA because he lost his tooth there, 'Um, I kept wobbling it after on the fourth pull, it came out'. Just like Tickerman's broken iPad, this really wasn't IKEA's fault, but they were being held to a longstanding grudge. The boys had strong feelings of hate for brand that they didn't feel were for them, such as Hello Kitty which was too 'girly', 'Uh, it's just that we're boys, and it's meant to be for girls' and Barbie, 'Put Barbie in hate, I will vomit, I'm about to vomit... Oh man, I hate Barbie and Ken!'. Mr Awesome had a particular passion for BT, that provided his internet connection, and made it possible for him to play his games and go online, 'even though I live right in the middle of a field, not right in the middle, like in front of the field'.

Overall, it was difficult to get the boys to articulate reasons why they liked or hated particular brands, unlike the Key Stage 1 girls who were able to provide a small amount of rationale. The boys were influenced by advertising for products they were interested in, but were most interested in franchise related toys, entertainment channels and absorbing computer games. The boys were keen on a broad range of food brands; tech brands like Angry Birds, Apple, BT, Cartoon Network, Minecraft, YouTube, Wii, Xbox and Talking Tom. Although their choices lacked rationale, they were passionate choices, such as, 'This man [holds Talking Tom card to chest] is to my heart'.

4.3.1.3 KEY STAGE 2

The youngest junior schoolgirls were able to talk more confidently about brands, citing a health yoghurt drink Actimel, and a discussion about their favourite hot chocolate brands and supermarkets. They were also able to recall advertising for their favourite cereals and sing the jingles showing excellent advertising recall.

The girls were very comfortable with the concept of brands and really enjoyed the sorting task. Esme settled into the task and started singing to herself. After completing the initial sort, they commented that they basically knew all of them! Esme had such a wonderful time that she started kissing brands that she loved such as Nickelodeon! She also started to make connections between brands and what she could find there relating to her favourite toy Shopkins; 'I like [YouTube] because I can watch most of my Shopkins videos,' and 'I love Argos because I love Shopkins'. Not all links were seen as good though, Meghan Trainor really didn't like Barbie, 'I hate it. I'm not into the Barbie movies and dolls.'

Although they were able to provide a rationale for their choices, these were short, but sweet, such as, 'Evian is really great because the water's really, really like, nice'; this brand rated well

considering it was just plain spring water. Nickelodeon was a popular brand because it offered endless series that the girls were interested in and could talk about with their friends. This was performing the role of a social brand helping the girls find a point of discussion.

The girls loved brands with a passion. Their brand loves included: Nickelodeon, Xbox, YouTube, Minecraft, Argos, C5 Milkshake, and a range of food brands. Unlike previous comments on IKEA, they thought the concept of eating and shopping was fantastic. They didn't like Barbie, Angry Birds, and the most divisive of cheeses for this study, Dairylea which made Meghan feel sick.

The youngest junior schoolboys had a head start on the branded breakfast activity as one of the boys had a Dad who worked at the local supermarket, so food brands were part of his daily life. The boys had strong brand knowledge and knew almost all of the brands, recalling advertising for some, even remembering a travel company advert. These challenging two were really into brands and had strong opinions albeit lacking in rationale, 'Love it! Yeah, love it! Love it! Yes, I love it! No, I hate it! Yes, I love it! Yeah, I love it! It's because you can squeeze it and put it all over your face. Yeah, I love it! Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, yeah, yeah.' Both boys had no time for babyish or girly toys, anything to do with shopping, and especially not toothpaste. The reason appeared to be down to cleanliness rather than taste. Jim Bobby explained his rationale for choosing his favourite brands, 'Because I need drinks, I need drinks, food, I need food, I need drinks, and I need more drinks, and more food, and more food, and more food, and more food. I like YouTube because it's got my favourite YouTubers. Subway, food. Xbox is just a really good console. Minecraft, I like it because it's a game, which is pretty famous. Amazon, that's where I get my games, computers and stuff'.

They also had excellent rationale for their hate brands. Evian was hated because, 'Why buy water when you can buy coke?' and Speedos, 'because they're about this big [makes a small size gesture with his hands] and really small'. Despite their flippancy, and the near chaos, both boys liked brands and specifically technology and food brands that played an enormous part in their life, much bigger than toothpaste.

The oldest junior schoolgirls had a firm recall of breakfast brands and could name them without prompting. They were able to discuss relevant advertising and what would attract them to a food product. Bob the Minion was also able to compare these to American brands as she spent time in America during the summer visiting her Mum's family.

The girls were able to make associations between the brands in the brand sort and things they had seen, such as a Dorito challenge on YouTube with a super spicy tortilla crisp in the packet, like a tortilla roulette. Bob the Minion put Mattel in the hate pile for their ethical practice; the girls had written to them during a lesson asking them to stop over-using packaging and destroying the rainforests. They were also able to connect Barbie and Mattel as being part of the same organisation.

Poor Dairylea cheese was once again rejected, this time for being, 'too dairy'. Jellyfish rated Boots the chemist because they sold a beauty range from her favourite vlogger Zoella, so a strong connection between her digital and offline interests.

Happy soul Bob the Minion rejected Angry Birds for being too angry. She wondered, 'Why don't they call them Happy Birds and make happy birds?' The girls were both big fans of IKEA, 'It's just amazing. It's just so big. And what happens, like, you can get, there's like, um, a big, um, section of rooms that you can, that you can get ideas from for your house, and there's, it's just so big. There's, like, a play, play area for kids, and there's also a Wii there, so that's the one I go to, so...' Again, this provided link between digital and offline activities and gave the girls a day out as well as things for their bedroom.

The girls were very aware of vloggers and their influence particularly in advertising products, but they were quite scathing of influencers who 'faked it' and didn't try out products properly, 'Because, like, they would use it out and not just in one video, maybe in a couple of videos, or like, when, if, like, you see them in a vlog, maybe they'd be using that product as well'. It appears that they were able to not only judge ethical credentials in brands, but the authenticity of virtual brands too.

The girls generated a long list of brands they loved with minimal hates. Although they were moving away from toys, they still had affection for some like PlayDoh. Shops like IKEA and Boots featured heavily, and entertainment brands like Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Netflix, CBBC, YouTube, and also a range of food and drink brands.

The oldest junior schoolboys were able to recall breakfast brands, like the older girls, with no prompting. They were able to judge how to choose a breakfast brand according to a quality / value judgement! They understand that value brands could be cheaper, but the taste might not be as good. They also confidently discussed different branding mechanisms like logos and how different cereal companies compared – as good as an undergraduate class on branding!

Unlike the older girls who loved shopping, the older boys had developed a dislike for the activity. Boots got a thumbs down as, 'Yes, my mum goes into it nearly every day and all I can smell is perfume and she spends forever in there and I just have to sit there looking at make up because there is nothing else to look at'.

They didn't have any reaction to products that were necessary but boring like Pampers, Colgate and Andrex toilet paper, unlike the younger boys who showed a strong dislike. Even Barbie, Baby Born, Baby Annabel and Hello Kitty had indifferent reactions, 'just boring'.

The boys were much more muted about brands, than some of the more passionate responses from Esme and KillerBoy6, and even the terrible twosome. They liked YouTube, 'Well, you can, you can kind of watch anything, like you can type in educational things, and you can watch things that you like'. They also had some good ideas about how brands could create more interesting things for them digitally, such as Haribo sweets making an app, 'You can have a Haribo game where you choose different sweets, and you do like running about and you have to eat another sweet in order to get more energy bars or something'.

The older girls were much more consumer focused than the boys at this stage. They appreciated being able to make choices, so Subway was rated because you can 'choose what you want', and Netflix, where you can 'watch anything'. The boys put baby toys in hate even though their vocal response was muted compared to the younger boys. They were keen on Minecraft, Nickelodeon, Nike, Nintendo, Xbox, Disney, LEGO, and a range of food brands amongst others.

4.3.2 BRAND SORTING TASK

In the brand sorting exercise, 75 brands were included covering a range of product categories from retail, entertainment, tech, toys, food and drink, and toiletries. The children awarded a total of 341 loves (out of a potential 1,200) compared to 115 hates, so more lovers than haters of brands. Dividing the sample into quarters, the children in Foundation stage had less brand awareness and awarded 51 loves, compared to 81 in Key Stage 1, 90 in lower Key Stage 2 and 111 in higher Key Stage 2. The older the children, the more brands they recognised on the first sort with the junior school children knowing nearly all of them. Girls loved brands more than boys, awarding 197 loves to 144, but boys hate more with 67 hates to 48; this is mostly down to the strong responses to hygiene brands, girls brands, and young children's toys (Table 29: Summary of Brand Sorting Task).

Table 29: Summary of Brand Sorting Task

Pair	Key Stage	Gender	Age	Codename	Love	Hate
1	Foundation	Girls	4-5	Elsa 1	25	1
1	Foundation	Girls	4-5	Elsa 2	14	0
2	Foundation	Boys	4-5	Spiderman	6	1
2	Foundation	Boys	4-5	Tickerman	6	3
3	1	Girls	5-6	Stuart	19	8
3	1	Girls	5-6	Taylor	18	13
4	1	Boys	6-7	Mr Awesome	24	15
4	1	Boys	6-7	KillerBoy6	28	8
5	2 (Lower)	Girls	7-8	Meghan Trainor	39	11
5	2 (Lower)	Girls	7-8	Esmé	16	2
6	2 (Lower)	Boys	8-9	Smiles	15	12
6	2 (Lower)	Boys	8-9	Jim Bobby	20	10
7	2 (Higher)	Girls	9-10	Jellyfish	28	8
7	2 (Higher)	Girls	9-10	Bob the Minion	38	5
8	2 (Higher)	Boys	10-11	Jim Bob the Bear	20	7
8	2 (Higher)	Boys	10-11	James Bond	25	11

As can be seen in Table 30: Top 20 Love Brands, food brands feature heavily in the top 20, with McDonald's the most popular brand. This is followed by Minecraft that had captivated the children from the youngest to the oldest, with its absorbing game play and creativity, and the chance to immerse themselves in another world, playing with siblings and friends if they wished. Xbox, YouTube and Wii have also featured heavily in the children's conversations with YouTube being popular for both genders for tutorials and entertaining content. Of those 20 brands, 10 could be considered digital offering either good website or app content, immersive online experiences, entertainment, search options, or retail offerings.

Table 30: Top 20 Love Brands



McDonalds	13
Minecraft	12
Kit Kat	11
Pringles	11
Coca-Cola	10
M&Ms	10
Argos	9
Haribo	9
LEGO	9
Toys R Us	9
Xbox	9
YouTube	9
Apple	8
Cadbury	8
Disney	8
Doritos	8
Google	8
Walkers	8
Wii	8
Pepsi	7

If McDonald's is the hero brand, then Barbie is the villain. In Table 31: Top 20 Hate Brands, poor Barbie is not popular and is followed closely by baby dolls and Hello Kitty. Pampers and Fairy were considered boring and certainly, nappies and anything to do with babies was not popular. Interestingly, both Angry Birds and Dairylea had strong reactions. Dairylea is a divisive brand like Marmite, and Angry Birds just gets some kids riled. It's too angry and irritating for them despite its popular appeal.

Table 31: Top 20 Hate Brands



Barbie	7
Baby Annabel	6
Hello Kitty	6
Pampers	6
Angry Birds	4
IKEA	4
Baby Born	4
CBeebies	4
Dairylea	4
Fairy	4
Sylvanian Families	3
C5 Milkshake	3
Boots	3
Colgate	3
H&M	3
Fisher-Price	3
Mattel	3
Coca-Cola	2
Apple	2
Doritos	2

4.3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK REVISITED

The conceptual framework from Chapter 2.4.5 can now be revisited following the analysis of the qualitative fieldwork. In the previous section, Fournier's work (1998, pp.366-368) was presented together with the digital indicators from The Smarty Pants Brand Love Study (2018), to propose an appropriate way to explain and understand the quality of children's relationships with brands in a digital environment. These dimensions based on an adult study related to love/passion; self-connection; interdependence; commitment; intimacy; and brand partner quality. The question was asked in Chapter 2.4.5 if these dimensions could also apply to children and brands in a digital environment.

4.3.3.1 LOVE/PASSION

The analysis demonstrated that children were uninterested in rating the brands that they placed in the 'like' category. Just like a Facebook thumbs up, 'like' was a sign of indifference. It meant, 'I know it,' 'My family use it,' 'I know the product category,' or 'I've seen it'. It most certainly did not move the children beyond a base level of brand preference. The children used 'Like' as a way to quickly sort the brand stack into a more manageable set before they decided which ones they loved or hated. These brand passions energised the children as Esme kissed her favourite brands, and KillerBoy6 hugged Talking Tom to his real heart, not just the paper version. Equally, some brands stirred the children in the opposite direction, with Barbie taking a battering from all sides, and Dairylea confined to the 'weird cheese' that's too 'dairy-like' corner. Love and hate was understandable for all age groups from the age of 4 to 11. Of course, it's not all about passions and the highs and lows of brand preference, the small shrugs of indifference are important for marketers; how can you turn that 'meh' feeling into something warmer that may, just may, turn into a brand relationship of note? Indifference can be used as a spur for action, in the way that Keller's model encourages marketers to keep brand building and moving their brand higher in his CBBE triangle towards resonance (Keller, 2013, pp.132-133). This is a relevant dimension for a children's model on child-brand relationship quality in a digital environment.

4.3.3.2 SELF-CONNECTION

This dimension is about identity and a sense of self. An important aspect of children's acceptance of a brand in this study was that it was for children their age. The boys in particular rejected, vehemently, any inference that a brand was for younger children, or perish the thought, girls. This is not to say that the blue/pink debate should rear its head again, or that toys should be gendered, which would be a step in a different direction to discourse today. Successful children's brands, as can be seen in the Top 20 love brands in Table 30, are popular for all ages from 4 to 11. There are certainly no Barbies, Baby Annabel's or Hello Kitty's in that top 20.

Family is part of that self-connection, and as has been seen throughout the secondary research in the literature review and in the analysis itself, family is the corner bed of children's socialisation (Moschis, 1985, pp.898-913; John, 1999, pp.183-213; Chitakunye, 2012, p.208; Kerrane and Hogg, 2013, p.518). The younger children in particular noted brands that had a connection to their parents who Kharuhayothin and Kerrane (2018, p.2329) found are the 'most powerful socialisation agents for children'.

A final aspect of this dimension is the opportunity for customisation. In the top 20 love brands in Table 30 are brands like McDonald's, LEGO, Minecraft and YouTube, all of which offer the chance for personalisation; you can add lettuce or remove sauce at McDonald's, build whatever you want in LEGO and Minecraft, and choose videos/channels of interest on YouTube. All of these brands offer powerful ways to personalise the brand experience. This is also a valid dimension.

4.3.3.3 INTERDEPENDENCE

This was the dimension that offered the best link with a digital branding environment, as it maps to Brand Love descriptors such as ‘Good for connecting with others (social)’, ‘Has a great website’, ‘Has a great app’, and ‘Convenient/Portable’.

This qualitative study found that children appreciated being able to download apps to their tablet or smartphone giving them a variety of ways to access branded games. They talked about the challenges of accessing certain screens in the house e.g., if they wanted to play the Wii games console when a cricket match was playing on the main screen, or if other people in the family were using the lounge. If brands are to demonstrate digital interdependence for children, they need to be accessible and convenient to use, through a multitude of channels and devices, and provide opportunities for connecting with others. Netflix, for example, can be watched through the main television in the living room, the Smart TV in the bedroom, the tablet, the smartphone and even the game console. Advances in gaming technology mean that popular children’s games like Fortnite can be played, not only on multiple platforms, but cross-platform on different devices with friends (Pena-Taylor, 2020). This means that one child can be playing via a Nintendo Switch while competing against their friend who is on an Xbox One. This is true digital interdependence.

Digital children’s brands need to stay relevant and prove themselves part of children’s daily lives, otherwise, other brands will move in, and they will be forgotten. One reason the Xbox was so popular with the boys in the study was that it offered the chance to access the internet as well as being a well-used games console. During the Covid-19 pandemic, online games like Roblox and Fortnite turned into a ‘virtual playground’ where children could ‘chat, hang out and play’, and Animal Crossing New Horizons provided escapism for bored children in lockdown by providing in-game virtual events (WARC, 2021b).

In the study, girls, in particular, needed an outlet for social interaction with opportunities to message and keep in touch. Boys need that too, but often on their own terms. The boys talked about ‘acknowledging’ friends or virtual friends then getting on with the game or activity.

For children to judge branded websites and apps as continuously ‘great’ to fit the dimension of interdependence, marketers need to keep their digital assets fresh and innovate. This could mean adding new levels to a game or adding Christmas decorations to the background. Minecraft proved so popular for the children in the study because of the different modes: creative (build undisturbed) and survival (buildings are attacked by zombies, skeletons and spiders). Fortnite has created an immersive digital environment that is always evolving, hosting virtual pop concerts with major artists, building a replica Super Bowl stadium, and linking up with Disney to promote the Star Wars franchise (Lang, 2021). Interdependence is an important and relevant dimension for demonstrating children’s connection to digital brands.

4.3.3.4 COMMITMENT

Building a relationship takes commitment, and one reason why brands like Minecraft, LEGO and the gaming consoles/games proved so popular is that it took hard work and investment for the children to reap the rewards of using the brand. The children talked about having different worlds that they had built in Minecraft, special furniture or skills that they had developed after watching YouTube tutorials, and hours of time spent building (or spawning

pigs). These were creative and immersive experiences for the children that gave them a deep, emotional connection to the Minecraft brand. The brand also acted as therapist for the oldest two schoolboys who were stressed by the pressures of end of Key Stage 2 exams, peer pressure, and growing up.

The children showed their commitment towards the food brands in different ways, they were able to sing advertising jingles perfectly, make connections between their favourite brand and brand extensions 'Coco Pops, Coco Crocs', take part in YouTube branded challenges like a Dorito tortilla roulette with a spicy crisp hidden in the packet, and visit branded experiences like Cadbury World to learn how to make chocolate. These examples show that children had moved beyond basic recognition (Ross and Harradine, 2004, p.18) to building memories and associations with the brand. This suggests that commitment is also a relevant dimension.

4.3.3.5 INTIMACY

The children in the youngest classes were naming brands by their product function e.g., food, but even those youngest children were starting to build brand meaning, as Tickerman connected the Nike swoosh with his golf gloves, a sport he loved to play with his Dad. The junior school children had even more personal associations with the brands, or connections, such as having visited Disneyland or tried brands in America on a special holiday or being desperate to have a NERF wars birthday party. The youngest children had little to no knowledge of advertising as a means to promote brands, 'what's advertising?' (Boys, Age 4-5) but could explain that they had seen the brand on television, but in the year above, children were able to explain they had seen an 'advert' for a film they wanted to see. Many of the children could sing jingles from adverts word for word or recalled brand mascots. The older girls appeared to develop a deep emotional connection to Zoella watching her make-up tutorials, buying products that she recommended, buying her own beauty line in retail outlets, or following her favourite vloggers that she mentioned in her videos. This suggests a strong feeling of intimacy as they learnt more about Zoella and her favourite things, copying her and buying her branded beauty products so they could be just like her. This intimacy transcended the online environment, moving into the physical as they bought her branded goods in a toiletries and cosmetics store. This dimension moves children from base levels of product category association towards recall and the building of personal associations and experiences, so it is also a relevant dimension.

4.3.3.6 (DIGITAL) BRAND PARTNER QUALITY

The oldest boys were able to make judgements about price/value for supermarket brands, and the oldest girls were critical about brands with a track record in sustainability, so doing good things for the environment or the world is important for children's brands. Durability and maintenance of performance was also important. Brands were blamed for problems that were not of their making, such as a broken iPad and a lost tooth in IKEA.

Children generally want an instant reward and are not interested in collecting loyalty points over the long term. Many of the brands in the top 20 list offered an instant hit of gratification e.g., KitKat, Pringles and Coca-Cola. Any level of reward would need to provide instant redemption e.g., free fries at McDonald's as a bonus when you order.

Is there anything missing? There are some additional points that would relate to a 'digital brand', which has been originated from the primary research in this study. The term 'digital brand' has been employed to refer to those brands which 'engage with children using digital platforms' (Confos and Davis, 2016, p.1994).

The most popular brands for the children that they talked about again and again were ones that offered them the ability to engage with the brand online and offline, through a multitude of touchpoints, with toys and other merchandising. Companies like LEGO have done this successfully, with the building block sets, a film franchise, and computer games. Disney has a film franchise, visitor attractions, stores and a wide range of merchandised items. This is clearly a contributing reason as to why these were the only two brands on the global ranking lists as presented in Chapter 2.4.4.

Cross-brand relationships are also important. Esme loved Argos because it sold her favourite toy Shopkins, and she loved YouTube because she could watch Shopkins videos. This may have been user-generated content from a Shopkins fan or branded content, but that link to extensive additional digital content should be part of a successful digital brand's partner quality promise. This then works with commitment and interdependence to build on the strength of the child-brand relationship.

Finally, children deserve to be protected from harm and it is clear from this research that children's agentic behaviour online means that they are not always as safe as they should be when seeking out brand related materials. Are children protected when they search for cheat codes or type in keywords to YouTube relating to toys? Brands have a responsibility to understand this behaviour and actively seek to improve the search environment, or work hand in hand with platforms like YouTube to test out keyword searches and recommend or authorise particular YouTubers to be working 'in association' with the brand. This must be done for a brand to truly acknowledge the power of its young audience but equally its fragility. Clearly, not all digital brand assets are owned assets; they are also earned assets.

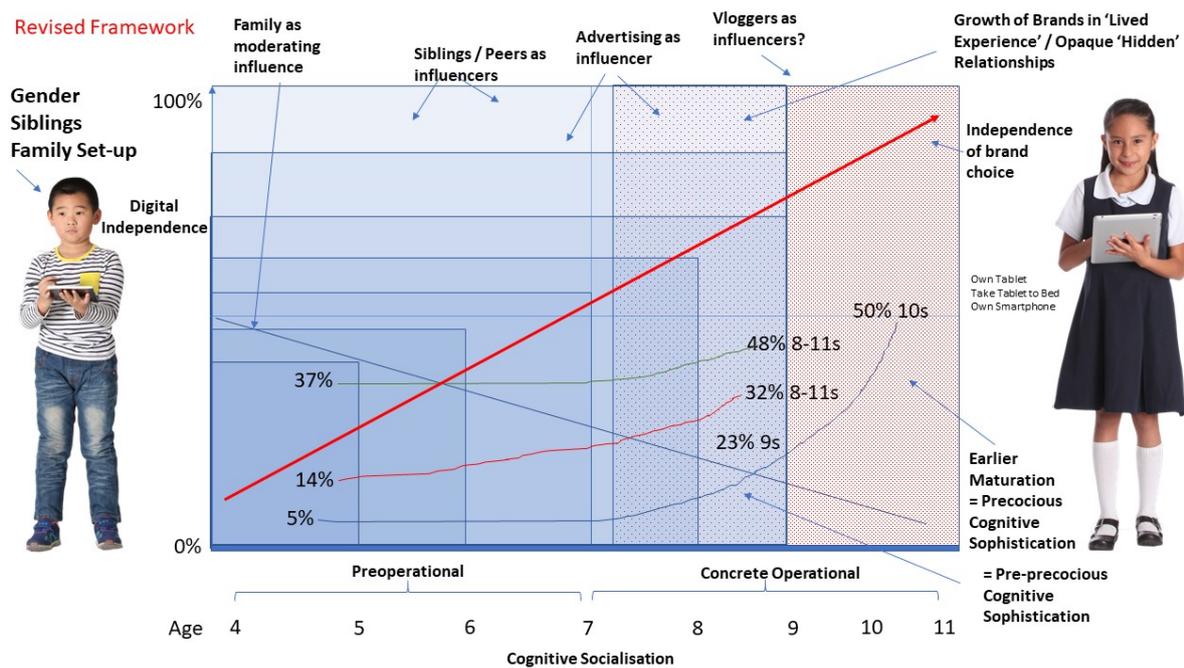
In conclusion, this analysis offers an original reinterpretation of Fournier's work based on adults, layered with the digital indicators from The Smarty Pants Brand Love Children's Study (2018), and has adapted Fournier's model by revising one of the dimensions and adding additional interpretation for all dimensions, with application to child-digital brand relationships. This is a new way of viewing the phenomenon of brand relationship quality with children.

4.3.3.7 BRAND DRIVERS FOR THE AGENTIC CHILD

The second aspect that was examined in Chapter 2.4.5 was a visualisation of brand drivers for the agentic child in the digital world. It was proposed that children from a young age are engaging independently in a digital environment with brands and making their own brand choices. From this qualitative research, it is indicated that this is indeed true, and from the age of 5 to 6 (Key Stage 1), children are indeed acting in an agentic fashion by using their digital devices away from the immediate supervision of their parents, and are engaging with brands online – either by downloading apps, playing games, watching entertainment channels or video content, searching for products, etc.

This agentic behaviour in the digital landscape is described in this revised conceptual framework in Figure 26: Revised Framework: Brand Drivers for the Agentic Child in the Digital World.

Figure 26: Revised Framework: Brand Drivers for the Agentic Child in the Digital World



Data Sources: Ofcom (2019); Harradine and Ross (2007, p.195; 2004, p.23)

Source: Author's Own Work (2021)

The differences are that 'Earlier Maturation = Precocious Cognitive Sophistication' is now joined by an additional column covering the period of 7 to 9 years old called 'Pre-precocious Cognitive Sophistication' where children are extremely brand aware and digitally active using devices independently and often with subterfuge. They may be searching for YouTube videos, messaging in-apps, or using their devices under the bedcovers. They lack the physical indicators of maturation that some of the older children will display, and they lack the cognitive sophistication that enabled the oldest junior school children to evaluate brands' sustainability practices (Mattel's packaging strategies), or the merits of the Disney Channel versus Nickelodeon based on the frequency and length of advertising breaks, 'It's so annoying [on Nickelodeon], because it's like, "what's going to happen next?" And then, like, the same thing, just goes like this (singing), and, like, oh, we have to wait for, like, three minutes' (Girls, Age 10-11). In some cases, children aged 7-9 could be at risk from their agentic brand behaviours.

The second change is the left-hand box over the little boy's head which indicates that his, and other children's brand building behaviour is impacted by gender, the presence of siblings, and family set-up which perhaps controversially suggests that there is a possibility that children with separated parents (non-gender specific), where there are two homes and two different systems of power, may be at risk from their agentic brand behaviours and the inconsistency of rules around gaming and device usage.

This conceptualisation provides a new way of looking at the agentic behaviours of children in a digital landscape in relation to brand relationships. This is an original contribution.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research objectives of this study will be reviewed.

RO1: To investigate the drivers of brand choice for children in a digital world.

The drivers of brand choice have been conceptualised in the adaptation of Fournier's work (1998) which was originally designed for adults. This was overlaid with the brand drivers identified in the quantitative children's Brand Love tracking study (2018) and reimagined for a digital context. These brand drivers are: Love and Passion; Self-Connected; Interdependence; Commitment; Intimacy; and the newly reconfigured Digital Brand Partner Quality. This is discussed in Chapter 2.4.5 in relation to the academic literature, and in Chapter 4.3.3, the dimensions in the revised brand relationship framework were put to the test by drawing on the qualitative analysis from this study, to see if the framework could offer a useful way of understanding the drivers of brand preference for children, particularly for those brands which 'engage with children using digital platforms' (Confos and Davis, 2016, p.1994).

From the earlier discussion, the first four dimensions could be linked to previous studies and brand relationship dimensions for children, but the key question and gap in knowledge, was if intimacy and brand partner quality were relevant brand drivers for this younger target group. Intimacy is defined as a deeper connection with a brand than love and passion which Fournier (1998) talked about in relation to interpersonal relationship theories. It could be created through brand meaning, personal associations and experiences (Fournier, 1998, p.365). The children in this qualitative study were building strong levels of brand meaning, one of the youngest boys had an emotional connection to the Nike swoosh and his golf gloves reminded him of the great times he spent playing golf with his Dad, and one of the oldest girls had a strong intimacy link to the brands that she used when she was in America visiting relatives. Many of the boys talked passionately about online computer games and the immersive experience of building and exploring over time. These brands literally took them to another world. The older girls had a deep emotional connection to vlogger Zoella, and this transcended the online environment to the physical, as they purchased her beauty products available in a popular toiletries and cosmetics store. It is therefore proposed that intimacy is a valid dimension for examining children's brand drivers, measuring a dimension that goes further than love/passion and which indicates a longer-term connection. It is a relevant dimension for children's relationships online and offline which has implications for marketers operating in an omnichannel marketing environment.

Brand partner quality can lead to overall relationship satisfaction and strength in the eye of the consumer. Key aspects of this dimension according to Fournier's research (1998, p.365) were that consumers should feel wanted, should feel the brand is dependable and reliable, and accountable for its actions. The older children were best able to judge brands' accountability e.g., for over-packaging, or the price versus value of supermarket products. Brands were easily blamed for durability and performance issues, even when it wasn't their fault e.g., the child broke their own iPad or lost their tooth in IKEA. There were some descriptors missing in the definition of this driver that are more relevant to brands that engage with children via digital platforms, namely, the ability to engage with the brand via a multitude of touchpoints, online

and offline, including toys and other merchandising; and cross-brand relationships e.g., watching Shopkins videos on YouTube and buying Shopkins in Argos. Therefore, although the brand quality partner dimension was valid, it needs to account for the digital nature of the brand-young consumer engagement.

The drivers of brand choice for children in a digital world have been constructed using Fournier's work based on adults, layered with the digital indicators from The Smarty Pants Brand Love Children's Study (2018), and adding additional interpretation for all dimensions, with application to child-digital brand relationships. This is a new way of viewing the phenomenon of brand relationships and the drivers of brand choice for children in a digital world.

RQ1: Who or what is influencing children to make brand choices in a digital environment?

Children are influenced by their family, more than parents think, but this influence decreases over time as children become more able to make their own choices and move towards the teenage years (Chapter 2.4.2). Children up to the age of 11 are heavily influenced by their siblings and friends. It was anticipated that virtual friends would be an important influence (friends that children engage with through social media but do not know in person, or whom they play with online in virtual worlds like Minecraft); there was no evidence in this research to support that. Many of the boys talked about 'acknowledging' virtual players or ignoring friend requests from unknown parties. This is not to say that it is not a factor, but more research is needed. Vloggers appear to have significant influence over children's brand choices. The older girls talked about beauty vlogger Zoella influencing their choice of make-up and buying Zoella's own branded products, and the older boys talked about a YouTube gaming vlogger Stampy who talked about branded games and provided a lot of good content for his fans.

RQ2: Are children making brand choices online autonomously and has their behaviour become more agentic in the digital landscape?

Children's behaviour is much more agentic in the digital landscape, and this is happening from a very young age, around 5 to 6 years old (Chapter 4.3.3.7). They are using their digital devices away from the immediate supervision of their parents, and are engaging with brands online – either by downloading apps, playing games, watching entertainment channels or video content, searching for products, etc.

Parental behaviour is facilitating this agency, such as passing smartphone handsets down the family chain upon upgrade, rather than considering the child's need or cognitive development at the time. This trend appears to have accelerated during the pandemic as children were given their own handset to stay in touch with friends and keep themselves entertained (Chapter 2.3.1).

Children are using their devices, particularly tablets, in their bedroom or in a relatively unsupervised way in the living room. The qualitative research in this study shows that from the age of 5, parental rules and restrictions start to decrease allowing children increased access to apps, search and YouTube. Their preferred brand sets form from their lived experience, but this very quickly extends to apps, games and entertainment channels and

from this point, children extend their brand portfolio through online and offline recommendations and their own search strategies.

In Figure 26: Revised Framework: Brand Drivers for the Agentic Child in the Digital World, the age band of 7 to 9 years old is identified as a consumer group that is showing much earlier maturation. This has been termed 'precocious cognitive sophistication'. This age group is extremely brand aware and digitally active using devices independently and often with subterfuge e.g., under the bedcovers. They lack the physical indicators of maturation that some of the older children display, and the cognitive sophistication to evaluate brands. In Chapter 2.1.6.1, research showed that teachers feel girls are much more 'street wise and sexually aware' than before (Finlay, Jones and Coleman, 2002, p.207) and notice obvious physical indicators of puberty but have no idea about boys' development. It appears that parents and teachers have noted that children are physically developing earlier and are starting to take note of indicators of physical development now seen around the age of 10 to indicate the child is growing up and that they might be trying to behave in a more 'street wise' way or engaging in riskier digital behaviours e.g., in their search terms. Actually, agentic behaviour in a digital landscape is happening earlier and, in some cases, children aged 7-9 could be putting themselves at risk e.g., they may feel technically confident creating digital video content on TikTok but are unable to judge the risks of recording from their bedroom. The conceptualisation in Figure 26 provides a new way of looking at the agentic behaviours of children in a digital landscape in relation to brand relationships and is an original contribution.

RQ3: Do traditional consumer buying behaviour models adequately describe children's current drivers of brand choice and associated behaviour?

Traditional consumer buying behaviour models do not adequately describe children's current drivers of brand choice and associated behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 2.4.2, traditional style models were established with adults in mind following a simple pathway of needs recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decision, purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Tuten, 2020, p.47; Chaffey and Smith, 2017, p.131). Newer models have tried to reflect a digital ecosystem for adult consumers considering multiple influencers and channels where consumers meet the brand at different touchpoints making several decisions leading to purchase (Tuten, 2020 p.56; Court, et al., 2009, p.3). Family, as a decision-making unit (Tuten, 2020, p.46), and the pester power of children on household purchases has been understood by marketers, and even encouraged, although this is now tempered by legislation (see Chapter 2.2.4).

The models discussed in the literature review show the influence of children on family purchasing, but do not necessarily reflect children's active role in brand choice and preference in a digital environment where transactions are not always financial or may be perceived by the child as free because of a subscription or saved password e.g., playing or downloading a branded game, watching videos or other entertainment online, or downloading an app. Traditional models could even be criticised as too linear and focused on the buying process which does not always take place in child-brand interactions in a digital landscape. The framework discussed in RO1 provides a clearer understanding of the drivers of brand choice for children in digital brand relationships.

RQ4: What is the best way to explore children’s own views and potentially changing and more agentic behaviours in order to answer this objective?

Researching children’s agentic behaviour requires an acknowledgement of their power and the relationship between the child and the researchers, as well as the definitive role to adopt in that research encounter. This is discussed in Chapter 4.1 with a conceptual framework in Chapter 4.1.4 which provides new understanding of the position to adopt for a qualitative researcher in children’s research.

This can be seen in Figure 19: The Role of the Researcher: Least-Adult: Most God-like?, it consists of four quadrants based on two axes: cognition and bearing. Researchers can use this to consider how best to project their expertise, knowledge and power with a power axis moving from submissive to sharing and dominant. The child’s perception of the researcher’s stance is plotted on the horizontal axis moving from low to high bearing. As discussed in Chapter 4.1.4, the challenge of considering how children are perceiving the researcher in field, has been a concern for many authors. This qualitative study fills a gap in understanding how children perceive the definitive role projected by the researcher.

Active participation methods using arts and creative based techniques is recommended, based upon the results of this study, with children able to select mediums based on their own interest and skill. These methods are reflected upon in Chapter 4.1.5. The most effective strategies in this study were modelling techniques online and offline, such as the use of PlayDoh, dolls house furniture, LEGO and innovatively, Minecraft which proved very effective in allowing children to take a power stance (by spawning pigs) and created a knowledge-discourse around their personal spaces online and offline.

RO2: To explore how children engage with brands online compared to other types of interaction.

The qualitative research has revealed that children can have immersive experiences with online brands that are completely absorbing, inspirational and even educational in the case of Minecraft. Boys in particular have a deep and passionate relationship with gaming consoles and computer games, they used the games as a way to bond with their friends and siblings when accessing each other’s worlds (Chapter 4.2.3). The youngest boys had an emotional connection to the educational games on CBeebies with a virtual ‘rat’ [it was actually a hamster] that they fed regularly, cared for and kept alive. Mr Awesome had an enthusiastic passion for the brand BT, that provided his internet connection, and made it possible for him to play his games and go online, even though he lived in the middle of a field (Chapter 4.3.1). Nickelodeon was a popular brand for programming content because it offered endless series that the girls were interested in and could talk about with their friends. This was performing the role of a social brand helping the girls find a point of connection. Online channels could also give the children access to their favourite brands e.g., YouTube providing access to their favourite YouTubers or Shopkins videos. Less popular or divisive brands did get some kudos for linking up with more popular digital brands e.g., IKEA had a Wii console in its children’s play area (Chapter 4.3.1). Online brand connections are clearly deeper, more long-lasting, emotional, and offer the chance to make social connections online and offline with siblings and other children.

In the brand sorting task (Chapter 4.3.2), food brands that offered instant gratification and fulfilled a hunger need featured heavily in the top 20 with McDonald's as the most popular brand. This is also a brand that has created a very successful omnichannel presence particularly during the pandemic with an ordering app, click and serve, etc. This was followed by Minecraft that had captivated children with its absorbing, social and immersive game play and creativity. Of those 20 brands, 10 could be considered digital offering either good website or app content, immersive online experiences, entertainment, search options, or retail offerings. Children enjoy engaging with the same brands online and offline, showing that there is the opportunity for more brands to take up this omnichannel all-encompassing approach to build a multitude of touchpoints and connections for children in this new world of digital experiences.

RQ5: What types of brands or product category are most attractive to children?

Like the published brand rankings (Chapter 2.4.4), the most popular brands include LEGO and Disney. These offer the opportunity to engage with the brand online and offline, through visitor attractions, movies, toys, and computer games. Children, as was seen in the results of the qualitative research, love food, fast-food restaurants and drinks brands offering instant gratification; games and consoles like Minecraft, Xbox and Wii; portals to entertainment and other content such as YouTube and Google; tech brands like Apple; and shops/websites like Argos that are a shopping portal to all the brands that children love.

RQ6: What meaning do children ascribe to these brand interactions online and does it differ to engagement with the same brands offline? Is there a brand relationship?

As has been analysed in the new adaptation of Fournier's work, noted in RO1, children ascribe greater meaning to their brand interactions online and enjoy brand relationships. Children are spending much more time with brands who connect with them via digital platforms. As can be seen in Chapter 2.3.2, even very young children are spending on average 3 hours online every day. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in children spending even more time online sourcing entertainment. Entertainment and gaming brands offer deeper, more immersive, engaging, and sociable experiences giving children the chance to develop intimacy, interdependence and high-level commitment (Chapter 2.4.5). It is not just gaming and entertainment brands that can take advantage of this digital connection, McDonald's was rated highly by the children in this qualitative study – it has one of the most recognisable brand symbols with the golden arches that can be identified by very young children (Chapter 2.4.1.1); it is a globally recognised brand (Chapter 2.4.2); it was universally liked by the children as a hero brand compared to Dairy Lea which was universally panned as 'weird cheese'; the food can be personalised e.g., no lettuce; it offers instant gratification; and new ways to connect digitally through apps, delivery services, online menus, etc.

The brand relationship with children is at its strongest when the interactions are linked in an omnichannel approach and children can engage online and offline with the same brand, enjoying games, toys, other merchandise, YouTube tutorials, and even films or visitor attractions e.g., Disney, Minecraft, LEGO. This also fits with the children's interest and engagement with brands that offered them experiences. One girl really enjoyed her trip to Cadbury's World where she learnt how to make chocolate. Cadbury was popular with 8 out of

the 16 children in the study. They liked the chocolate but only one mentioned the visitor attraction two hours away from their hometown. One of the boys suggested that Haribo sweets could create more interesting things for them digitally like a game 'where you choose different sweets, and you do like running about and you have to eat another sweet in order to get more energy bars or something'. If Cadbury were to create digital games and online touchpoints for children, the brand would have better resonance with them and would improve upon the love/passion, interdependence, commitment, intimacy and digital brand partner quality brand drivers. Equally, IKEA who appeared as joint third on the children's brand sort hate list (Table 31: Top 20 Hate Brands), had positive comments about the Wii in the children's play area and from the older girls who thought it was a great place to eat and shop for things in their bedroom. IKEA is a brand that uses omnichannel marketing and augmented reality effectively with its adult consumers, but actually children often accompany their parents to the store, and the duration of the visit may be a few hours or more, so why not do more for children who might want to design their own bedroom through games, augmented reality, and YouTube and TikTok tutorials? This may encourage children to feel more positively about the brand at various touchpoints by increasing the digital interaction.

RQ7: Do these interactions with brands differ by gender, age or other demographic factors?

It is indicated from the qualitative research that there are differences by gender, and boys are certainly behaving differently because of their interest in gaming. Girls behave differently because of their interest in social interaction and shopping. There are differences in age. This is based on cognitive differences, and children's behaviour and language were observed to develop age group by age group, with the oldest children showing strong indicators of concrete operational behaviours. Parental restrictions reduce from the age of 5 which also has an impact on behaviours by age. There are other demographic factors at play. Siblings play a huge role in teaching digital skills and digital socialisation. Children with older siblings appear to socialise or acquire digital devices earlier. As the literature review revealed, physical maturation is occurring earlier, and children are more sexually aware (Chapter 2.1.6.1). All of the junior school children (aged 7-11) understood the general concept of the sexting that had been taking place at the local senior school. The qualitative research suggested that children with separated parents may engage with brands and the digital environment differently, perhaps more riskily, because of competing rule systems in opposing parent's homes. More research is needed on this topic.

RQ8: Are children navigating digital environments independently?

The qualitative research has suggested that children are navigating their own devices independently at the age of 4, but from the age of 5 without supervision. This is analysed in Chapter 4.2.4.1.

As discussed in Chapter 2.3.1, 15% of 3-4s, 14% of 5-7s, and 32% of 8-11s who own their own tablet and 45% of 8-11s who own a mobile phone can take the devices to bed with them (Table 4: Proportion of Children Using Devices at Bedtime). This is a significant point; having devices in a bedroom at bedtime is a demonstration of parental trust and lenience because the child could be using it through the night instead of sleeping.

By extrapolating these results from Ofcom's research (2019) to the UK population using ONS data (Table 5: Estimate of Children's Independent Use of Devices at Bedtime), it was estimated that there are 703,400 children aged 3-11 using their own tablets at bedtime, which is 9.5% of all UK children in this age band, and 548,707 children aged 8-11 using their smartphones at bedtime, which is 7.4% of all UK children in that age band. It is proposed that parents are far stricter with bedtime usage than daytime usage, so this estimate is hypothesised to be the lowest estimated figure of independent usage. Using an Australian study as an indicator (Given, Winkler, Wilson, et al., 2014), the indicative figures could actually equate to 45% of children using digital devices independently and unsupervised, this would equate to 1,579,577 children aged 3-11, which is 21.4% of all UK children in that age band (Table 6: Estimate of Children's Independent Use of Smartphones - Daytime).

It is highly likely that more children have been using their own digital devices independently during the pandemic, particularly when parents and children have been trying to work and learn from home and find a space in the house to concentrate. With more children now having their own mobile handsets since the pandemic, there is likely to be significant growth in the number of children navigating digital environments independently.

RQ9: Are children navigating digital environments safely, with an awareness of the commercial nature of these interactions?

This study has found that there is a significant rise in 'underage' children with social media profiles (from 25% of 5-11s to 42% according to Ofcom 2019 and 2021a) although this is not conclusive due to the change in methodology in the latest tracking study due to the pandemic (Chapter 2.3.4). Ofcom data (2019) also shows that 75% of 5-15s are using YouTube to view content (Chapter 2.3.2) and more than a third of 8-11s watch YouTube influencers who more often than not post commercial content. More than half of 5-15s posted or shared content on video sharing platforms including TikTok, YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat and around 8% of 8-11s are creating their own live posts (Ofcom, 2021a). There is no indication from Ofcom's data as to whether children are broadcasting live privately to their friends or if they are exposing themselves more widely.

Children are potentially exposed to adult content on YouTube as the use of the kids app is not prevalent and could see inappropriate recommended content on the banners and search bars. Equally, children may be exposed to editorial content within videos on the mainstream YouTube channel and on streaming platforms like Netflix that contain product placement. Although the very youngest children aged 4-5 had little grasp of the terms 'ad, ads, adverts or advertising', the next age group had quickly grasped the idea of brands using 'adverts' to sell their products during their favourite programmes. According to the qualitative research, understanding of advertising increases throughout the junior school years, with a cognitive grasp of commercial influence from the ages of 9. Commercial understanding of interactions or indeed vlogger's motivations on YouTube is very weak before this age, although there is emerging understanding in the 'pre-precocious cognitive sophistication' group identified in the conceptual framework in Chapter 4.3.3.7.

Even the youngest children had emerging ideas about computer and internet safety, 'I don't put water [on the computer]. I dry my hands when I'm going to the toilet' (Chapter 4.2.6). The children aged 5-7 were aware of online videos with 'naughty words' but were putting messages

on the DS console without knowing where they were going or typing random search words into YouTube. From an early age, children were aware of online stranger danger. The gamers were more exposed to viruses or malware and would regularly hunt down cheat codes and enter them into the system with no real sense of their legitimacy.

In conclusion, boys face different safety concerns compared to girls, and this also relates to gamers versus non-gamers. Brands should do more to protect children looking for content related to their brands online. Children's awareness of safety online relates to internet viruses and online predators, but more could be done by educators to inform them about the commercial nature of their online interactions. Younger children are not as able to judge vlogger's motivations or the authenticity of their product related claims. Children can also find it difficult to judge what is advertising when there may be pre-roll videos on YouTube, product placement, and influencers' product recommendations in different programming formats and channels. Consequently, children are not always safe nor are they always fully aware of the commercial nature of their brand interactions.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study relate to the practice of market and social research with children, and the brand choices of child consumers.

5.1.1 RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

The agentic child has a voice. We have seen children willingly share knowledge about themselves with researchers through participative methods as keen and active participants. However, researchers should not assume that methods or strategies that have worked in the past will work today or that ethical risk mitigation is adequate. A digitally agentic child may have their own email address and could bypass normal consent procedures to engage in research by answering messages on behalf of or in the guise of a parent, or they might complete a pop-up survey or poll, perhaps to benefit from an incentive. The benefits of using Minecraft as a participative method in this study outweighed the disadvantages, but two boys did make a powerplay by quickly spawning pigs in the recreation of their home and the space where they used the internet.

This study took place using a face-to-face qualitative method. The data was rich and insightful and the research experience practical, fun, and energised. The recording equipment could be moved to capture the creative and arts-based activities, each child could work with different equipment, and the activities of both children in the buddy pair could be fully observed. The school environment was safe for the children and the researcher, and without that location, it would have been more complex to arrange buddy interviews. The power dynamic would have been different had the children been interviewed at home or at a club. In person, the children's facial expressions told a story in themselves. All voices could be clearly heard. The children wiped their noses with the backs of their hands with abandon. Could that approach have been replicated in a Covid-safe way?

Today, and for the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that a school would grant the researcher the kind of access that was enjoyed without a full Covid risk assessment, all toys and equipment being wiped down and not shared, sterilising equipment between use, wearing face masks, socially distancing, taking Covid tests, not mixing between bubbles, and so on. It is

hoped that the pandemic will ease and face to face research will continue, but for now, this kind of research with children is on hold. Participative methods using creative and arts-based techniques could be used with online research, but it would require adaptation, e.g., screen capturing software could be used if the children played Minecraft using the same world or art equipment could be supplied to the school. However, having the researcher at a distance would make it harder to connect with the young participants and powerplays would be more likely e.g., a child may carry on playing and ignore the researcher. Equally, if the research still took place in a school with the researcher at a distance, a teacher would have to supervise the children, changing the power dynamic and the projected role of the researcher completely.

Therefore, the relationship between the child and the researcher may continue to change as we evolve new 'safe' ways to conduct research with children. The dynamic of the power relationship between the child and researcher in online qualitative research is not known, but this is an area for further research, particularly if we continue to be restricted by issues relating to the Covid19 pandemic.

This study supports the growing recognition of children's increased agency as they confidently navigate the internet (often with minimal adult support, intervention or restrictions), but suggests that children lack the cognitive or emotional capacity to manage the implications of their independence in a digital world. Therefore, age and cognitive development should be acknowledged by researchers through the choice of definitive role to project to digital natives, but also in how they discuss topics relating to digital media, online behaviours, and digital marketing.

5.1.2 (DIGITAL) BRAND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

This study extends the marketing literature by exploring consumer behaviour and brand choices of child consumers in a business environment that is characterised by the increasing role of digitalisation and an increased complexity. Whilst previous research has acknowledged the role of children as active participants/determinants in brand choices, the empirical documentation has been very slim, probably because of the apparent difficulty in conducting research with children as the unit of analysis. Hence, the present study adds to our understanding of the drivers of brand choice for children in digital brand relationships.

It is also interesting to note that traditional consumer buying behaviour models do not adequately describe children's current drivers of brand choice and associated behaviour. This indicates that focal theories such as traditional consumer buyer behaviour models, which mostly focus on the 'act of purchase' of the 'average customer', whilst relevant, cannot absorb or mitigate the differentiation of the drivers of children brand choices from the drivers of typical ('non-children') consumer decisions. This is due to the complexity of the child-brand interactions in a digital landscape and the number of factors that should be taken into consideration to fully understand what drives children's brand choices. The proposed research model may add to the complexity of the set of factors and the mechanisms behind brand choices, but it offers a means to understand the process that is closer to reality. The study offers useful insights and provides a pragmatic and comprehensive analysis on this area of consumer behaviour that is often neglected from the literature.

The implications of this research for marketers is that brands that appeal or involve both adults and children should consider how best to include children in an omnichannel marketing environment e.g., IKEA is innovative in its marketing strategies towards adults adopting new techniques like augmented reality but has not extended this strategy to helping children design their bedrooms in a fun and immersive way. Brands like Cadbury's could further their appeal online by offering children games or fun video content on sharing platforms e.g., how to make chocolate at home.

Cross-brand relationships are another area for marketers to consider and the benefit of these has been explained in this study. Children love it when their favourite brands cross paths with other favourite brands. Experience marketers should consider how to market their brand through memorable experiences or events for children to enjoy online to extend intimacy, interdependence and digital brand partner quality by increasing interactions, positive experiences and rewarding fans, e.g., taking advantage of technological advances in virtual worlds where real pop stars can put on virtual concerts, or your avatar can visit McDonald's in Roblox.

Marketers globally are likely to see differences in media usage and behaviour amongst children as all countries have been impacted by this worldwide pandemic. The acceleration of mobile phone ownership is unlikely to dissipate. It has been seen in this research that children with older siblings are gifted with a handset earlier than those without. Children have been given handsets at a younger age to counter the impact of not seeing their friends in real-life during lockdowns. Children will not willingly hand these back now Pandora's box has been opened.

The implication of children's increased usage of devices and growing independence, often using these devices with little supervision is also unknown. Children may be more at risk with their agentic behaviour tested, particularly if the number of creative digital makers increases e.g., child gamers designing shared worlds, vloggers, TikTok video makers, etc.

In Europe, the trend is towards self-regulation in the marketing industry, but elsewhere, countries like the USA, India and China are looking to regulate further. It is important that brand marketers in Europe consider how their brand should behave ethically in order to mitigate the risk of increased legislation. Brands should be doing more to protect children from their own agentic and digitally sophisticated behaviour (that is not matched by their cognitive or concrete operational abilities), e.g., analysing potential search words that children might use relating to a favourite brand and setting alerts for unsafe digital content that has been uploaded. Brands should also seek out relevant popular influencers and engage them in making safe content. Children want content. They want lots of it, but they deserve to be safe. Marketers stimulate children's interest in brands and so it is marketing's responsibility to protect children from malign influences related to that brand's content, and to be clearer about commercial intent.

Equally, brands need to consider that even if they do not target children as a primary audience, they may well be a secondary audience. Mostly, children are not searching for content via children's search engines; they are arriving via the same routes and channels as adults. This must be noted by marketers and is relevant to all global markets. Even in markets like Africa, where digital penetration has not been as fast, mobile phone ownership is rising quickly; it is mobile phones and tablets that are driving children's independent usage of the internet.

5.2 CONTRIBUTION

This doctorate study has made three original contributions to knowledge:

1. In Chapter 4.1.4, the conceptual framework titled 'The Role of the Researcher: Least-Adult: Most God-like?' offers a new way of examining the definitive role projected by the qualitative researcher in children's research and its interpretation by the young participants. It uses the concepts of power, bearing and cognition providing new guidance for ethnographers and moderators and adding to the literature on power-relations in qualitative research in the social sciences. It should also prove valuable to children's researchers in other disciplines.
2. In Chapter 4.3.3, an original reinterpretation of Fournier's work based on adults, layered with the digital indicators from The Smarty Pants Brand Love Children's Study (2018) has been presented. This has adapted Fournier's model by revising one of the dimensions and adding additional interpretation for all dimensions, with application to child-digital brand relationships. This is a new way of viewing the phenomenon of brand relationship quality with children.
3. In Chapter 4.3.3.7, a new conceptualisation of the agentic behaviour of children in the digital landscape including brand drivers and key influences provides more weight to the understanding of children's digital brand relationship quality. It identifies a new consumer grouping titled 'Pre-precocious Cognitive Sophistication' of children aged 7 to 9 years old who are experiencing earlier maturation, are extremely brand aware and digitally active using devices independently, often with subterfuge.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The nature of the research was qualitative so the sample size could be a limitation. Eight pairs of children were observed and interviewed (16 children) with two interviews per pair. This is a good weight of data for qualitative research, but the findings may not be indicative of children's behaviour in other countries or places in the UK.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Five areas of future research have been identified:

1. Virtual friends were predicted to be influential in children's digital lives. This research did not suggest that was the case, however, a larger study may provide more evidence.
2. The qualitative research suggested that children with separated parents may have more agentic behaviours digitally and may be more at risk online. Only three children in this study had separated parents. It would be very interesting to explore this further as there are growing numbers of children in this situation, and many children in alternative family set-ups.
3. Does the conceptualisation of the role of the researcher relate to online field research as well as face to face field research? This is a growing area of interest as the Covid19 pandemic has pushed more qualitative research online and may continue to do so.
4. The conceptualisation of brand drivers using Fournier's work could be examined and tested in a quantitative study for more measurable results.
5. Is the creative digital maker culture putting children at risk through their agentic online behaviours? This could examine children's behaviours around designing shared

worlds and operating servers for online computer games, vlogging in categories like unboxing, and live streaming on video sharing platforms like TikTok.

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