Fads and Children:
The Early Culture of Consumption

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in Marketing Management with Honors
May/2006

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ABSTRACT

Fads have the ability to consume our attention and cause us to defy our better judgments. They have the power to pervade society with an intensity that rivals the infectiousness of an epidemic. Despite the influence of this phenomenon, there is no systematic assessment of the emergence of fads and their impacts on society. This thesis, “Fads and Children: The Early Culture of Consumption,” examines the effects of fads on children and families.

This project begins by highlighting the fundamental characteristics of fads and how fads differ from traditional products. Since a discussion of the entire subject of fads would be overwhelming, this thesis focuses on fads as they pertain to a particular segment of the society. The children’s demographic was selected because of its potential as a dynamic market. This demographic is chosen also because of the increased susceptibility of children to fad activity. Children are known for their desire for the newest items and their perception of fads as the key to popularity and increased self worth. When compared to previous generations, children also possess greater spending power and purchasing influence.

As a result of heightened competition and the potential benefits that can be generated from the children’s market, some marketers are prone to adopt potentially unethical approaches to reach children with their fad items. Although the methods of reaching children with fads and traditional products are the same, the impacts on children are dramatically different. Therefore, it is important to study how practices associated with marketing fads may influence children and the broader society.

As a consequence of greater purchasing power on the part of children, more invasive marketing tactics, and the potential guilt and indulgence by parents, children are more inclined to exhibit feelings of narcissism, entitlement, and over-indulgence. Recommendations are included in this thesis in order to minimize the likelihood of these consequences.
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ADVICE FOR FUTURE HONORS STUDENTS

So, you have decided to take on the task of writing an honors thesis. Congratulations! When I told some of my peers that I was going to write a thesis, “congratulations” was far from the response I received. Many of them pointed out the amount of work and commitment that was required in order to compose a quality thesis and the fact that I would be taking away from the “senior year experience.” I would like to tell you that this is inaccurate. You should be commended for your decision because it is a task that many people shy away from. Your decision shows that you are up for the challenge.

Now that I have gotten that off my chest, please allow me to give you some advice as you create your own thesis. The following are the major points that you should consider as you write your thesis:

1. **Topic Selection:** Topic selection is extremely important because the topic is the foundation of your entire discussion. Make sure that you select a topic that you are interested in because you will be working with that subject matter for a long period of time. It will be easier to research and write about a topic that you are interested in as opposed to a topic you hate. You should also consider the amount of research that can be acquired with a particular topic. It may be more difficult to write about a subject that has few resources, unless it is a topic for which you can generate your own data. You do not want to realize late in the game that you hate the topic you selected or that there are few resources in relation to that topic. This might push you to select another topic or stop writing your thesis all together. In some cases, you may be able to adjust your topic so that it is feasible.

2. **Thesis Advisor and Second Reader Selection:** When selecting a thesis advisor and second reader, it is important to consider their knowledge of and experience with the topic you have chosen. When the advisor and reader are knowledgeable about your thesis topic, they will be able to provide you with insightful feedback that will improve the quality of your thesis. It is also important to evaluate how
much time that the advisor and reader will have to work with you on your thesis. It is important to have individuals who are available for feedback and guidance.

3. Scheduling: When I read the advice sections of previous theses, I could not help but notice how many of them suggested that you start your thesis as early as possible and create a timeline. Although this is sound advice and may alleviate some of the last minute stress, it is not always feasible. For those of you who are discouraged from creating a thesis because you feel that you have too many obligations or because you would like to pursue such activities as studying abroad, I would like to tell you that it is still possible to complete your thesis on time. Although I studied abroad for the spring semester of my junior year (and did nothing for my thesis during that time) and applied for law school during the fall semester of my senior year, I was still able to make time to research and write my thesis. Although I failed to meet the deadlines that I established for myself in my timeline due to my hectic schedule, I was able to overcome this issue by writing portions of the paper in blocks. I think that scheduling is subjective; it is based on how much you can accomplish in a particular period of time.

4. Editing: It is very important to edit and revise your thesis in order to create a presentable and understandable product. Editing should be performed in terms of both content and technical structure (grammar, punctuation, wording, etc.).

5. Balance: As I stated above, one often considers a thesis to imply being consumed with work and having no social life whatsoever. This is not necessarily true. Although it may be difficult at times, finding the balance between your personal and academic lives is possible. Take breaks in order to refresh yourself. In some cases, setting short term schedules can also be effective. Don’t let the thesis overwhelm you. You are in control.

My final Words...
I would like to point out that everyone is different and what may have worked for me may not necessarily work for you. Don’t worry, though, because as you progress through your thesis experience, you will discover what path is right for you.

*Good Luck and God Bless!!!*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect on my thesis experience and overall academic and personal growth, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the individuals who have assisted me throughout my journey. I am so blessed to have the support of such talented and knowledgeable individuals.

❖ First and foremost, I would like to thank God for blessing me with the strength and motivation to pursue my goals and for providing me with the opportunities I have received. Without faith in him, I would not have come this far.

❖ To my parents, Gloria and Stephen- your strength, knowledge, and perseverance have been a true inspiration. Your love and support have provided me with the tools to succeed. I love you!

❖ To my cousin, Lyndona, and best friend, Kenneth- thank you for always being there for me. When I felt I could not go on, you both were there to pick me up and help me to move forward. I love you guys!

❖ To my niece, Chyanne- although you may not yet realize it, you have contributed to this thesis. By just being yourself, you provided me with an additional resource for my thesis. Meeka loves you!

❖ To my cousin, Dwayne- although you are no longer with us, you have not been forgotten. You have had a profound impact on me and have shown me that I am stronger than I realized. I hope you are smiling down on us all. Rest in peace.

❖ To my thesis advisor, Associate Dean Tankersley- thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me and provide me with suggestions on how I could improve my thesis. By challenging me, you helped me to bring my thoughts to the next level. I am so grateful for having the opportunity to have worked with you. It was my pleasure.

❖ To my second reader, Professor Mazumdar- I am extremely grateful for your assistance and feedback regarding my thesis. Despite your hectic schedule,
you were more than willing to assist me with this momentous task. Your input was extremely helpful. It was my pleasure.

- To my advisor extraordinaire, Mr. Steve Wright- I cannot begin to express my appreciation for your guidance and support. You helped to make my hectic situation manageable. Thank you for helping me to keep it all together.

- To Professor Nunlee- thank you for your assistance at the inception of my thesis. It was you who referred me to Dean Tankersley and it was in your class that I had the initial idea to write a thesis on fads.
Fads and Children: The Early Culture of Consumption

Purpose:

It comes quickly, out of nowhere with no warning or explanation, and spreads with contagious tenacity throughout society only to vanish just as swiftly. Although it may sound like a serious disease, it is not a sickness, and though it may appear to be the proverbial “now you see it, now you don’t,” it is not a magic trick. This phenomenon is the fad; it requires no assistance from the supernatural and its infectiousness is derived from various factors including timing, the market environment, and a little bit of luck.

Since fads can be evaluated on various levels, such as source and demographics, a discussion of the entire concept of fads would be quite overwhelming. I have therefore decided to focus on a specific aspect of fads, particularly fads that affect children between the ages of six and twelve. The relationship between fads and children was chosen as the primary focus of this study because of its applicability and importance to both marketers and the average citizen, and the overall social implications of this relationship.

While several marketing publications merely devote a few paragraphs to the topic of fads, this study will provide an in depth analysis with concrete examples. This analysis is multifaceted with emphasis on determining the importance of fads, why they exist, their affect on children, and whether marketing can create fads. The primary objectives of this study are to identify the importance of the study of fads, examine the differences between fads and traditional products (in terms of product characteristics and marketing practices), and raise issues regarding the ethical nature of marketing fads to children. As
marketers employ various tactics to persuade children to participate in fad activities and purchase their fads, the concepts of ethics and social responsibility become significant issues that should be addressed.

The seven major research questions that will be highlighted in this analysis are as follows:

1. What are fads and why are they important to study?
2. Why do fads exist?
3. How do fads differ from traditional products?
4. How do fads influence childhood behavior and development?
5. Can marketers create fads?
6. Is the marketing of fads to children any different than marketing traditional products to children?
7. Are there ethical issues in marketing fads that are different than marketing traditional products to children?

Before continuing with the analysis of fads, it is important to highlight a particular reference that has significantly contributed to this study and served as the basis for further analysis. The *EPM Fad Study* by Karen Raugust was a report that examined various aspects of fads by researching the history of more than 100 fads from different demographics, decades, and genres. This was the only report that I found that provided a comprehensive analysis of fads.
Section 1: What are fads and why are they important?
Section 1: What are fads and why are they important?

Before beginning the discussion of fads, it is important to gain an understanding of what fads are. According to Kotler (1993), “fads are fashions that enter quickly, are adopted with great zeal, peak early, and decline very fast” (p. 331). Raugust (1998) furthers this definition by highlighting the activities of the fad and its impact on consumers by stating that during the fad’s short life, “it manages to permeate the culture and generate significant expenditures on the part of consumers” (p. xi). The initial definition highlights the main characteristics of fads as being adopted quickly with great enthusiasm and being short-lived while the second explanation emphasizes the importance of fads. Although fads may exist for a brief period of time, they have the potential to generate substantial monetary gains.

Just like Rodney Dangerfield, fads “get no respect” or at least not the respect they deserve. Oftentimes, marketing texts and scholarly periodicals devote merely a few paragraphs to describe the concept of fads. However, the subject of fads is far more interesting and complex than its previous depictions and deserves thorough consideration and discussion. Fads are important to marketers because of their financial potential and to the society as a whole because of their ability to define a generation. Fads can be quite lucrative for marketers who are able to capitalize on them and in many cases do not require substantial investments because the media and customers eventually propel them.

Although fads can be short-lived, they can be quite influential while they are in the spotlight. Fads are also multifaceted in their ability to affect society.
Skolnik (1978) points out America’s apparent affection for and embrace of fads through awareness and/or participation by stating, “It’s a rare citizen who has never been caught up in the frenzied whirl of a new craze. We are a nation of faddists. We wear fads and eat fads, play fads and go to fad events” (p. 2). Consequently, fads can affect all members of society, adults and children, alike.

Fads are particularly important in terms of the potential monetary benefits that can be enjoyed within the children’s market. Marketers are increasingly focusing on the children’s demographic because of the potential short-term monetary gains (particularly in the form of sales) and the long-term benefits (in terms of consumer loyalty). How Marketers Target Kids (2005) supports this assertion by stating that “[k]ids represent an important demographic to marketers because they have their own purchasing power, they influence their parents’ buying decisions and they’re the adult consumer of the future.”

Children are a particularly important demographic to study because of their ability to promote consumption on various levels. Mullinger (n.d) has even gone so far as to proclaim today’s children “the most wanted generation in history” because “they have more money to spend and are better educated than any generation before.” It is important to point out that it is the interplay between the increased amount of purchasing power and knowledge that enhances the child’s ability to influence spending situations. Children do not simply have the monetary capability but an increased understanding of what they “want” and “need” to buy and where they want to spend that money.
As discussed above, children possess considerable spending power. Redefining Progress (1999) asserts that “children’s aggregate spending has recently increased exponentially.” Children are spending more than ever. For example, tweens, which is the segment of the children’s market aged eight to twelve, spent $21.7 billion of their own money (Mullinger, n.d.). MacPherson (2005) also asserts that “children's spending has roughly doubled every 10 years for the past three decades, and by 2002, children 4-12 spent $40 billion, according to a report by a group called MarketResearch.com.”

Raugust (1998) also incorporates another component to the equation of child consumption by pointing out that several of the products targeted to children are “property-based and heavily supported by licensing, promotional tie-ins and entertainment vehicles of all types. As a result, crazes that arise in this age group tend to generate the highest participation levels, particularly when measured in retail sales” (p. 33). This point was illustrated in the EPM’s study as 33% of the fads that were targeted to children generated more than $41 billion in retail sales of all merchandise in the United States while another 40% generated sales in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

In conjunction with the money possessed by children is the increased knowledge of what to do with it. Mullinger (n.d) proclaims that children are becoming smarter consumers at a younger age than ever before. They are becoming more aware of marketers’ efforts to gain their attention and the importance of finding a brand that they can connect with. Redefining Progress (1999) furthers this assertion by stating that “long before children know how to
read and write, they are learning the ABCs of consumption… Stuff is good, more is better, too much is just enough.” Not only do children want more but they want the hottest and newest items on the market; this is where fads can significantly capitalize because of their ability to create an image of mass appeal and acceptance.

In addition to having control over their own purchases, children exert considerable influence over the spending habits of their parents. *How Marketers Target Kids* (2005) states that “today’s kids have more autonomy and decision-making power within their family than previous generations, so it follows that kids are more vocal about what they want their parents to buy.” According to Redefining Progress (1999), children directly influenced parental spending of $188 billion in 1997 and indirectly influenced $300 billion more. Children have so much influence that they can also contribute to major purchases such as houses and cars. Rosenberg (2000) points out that “children influence 40% of parents’ purchases, while 65% of parents explicitly solicit children’s opinions about products purchased for the entire household, including cars and computers.” *How Marketers Target Kids* (2005) discussed the concept of “pester power,” which refers to “children’s ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy.” To marketers and advertisers, pester power is a major factor because they understand how powerful it can be in influencing the purchase and creating sales. According to The National Toy Council (2006), pester power consists of two categories, persistence and importance. Persistence nagging is not as effective as importance nagging because persistence nagging is merely a
repetitive plea while importance nagging appeals to parents’ desire to provide the best for their children and any parental guilt.

Not only do children influence parental spending, but they are also doing it at an earlier age. Rice (2002) states that as children grow older and as they are exposed to more advertising, their requests from parents become more specific. For example, a four-year-old may ask for a doll while a five- or six-year-old may demand a Phoebe Bratz doll with matching accessories.

In addition to the short term potential for monetary gain for marketers, they also understand the importance of creating long-term brand loyalty. With evidence stating that children possess the ability to identify particular brands at earlier ages and with a large percentage of fads developing into franchises, marketers see the potential benefit of reaching children at an early age. How Marketers Target Kids (2005) supports this assertion by stating that “marketers plant the seeds of brand recognition in very young children, in the hopes that the seeds will grow into lifetime relationships.” In fact, the Center for a New American Dream found that babies can recognize and form mental images of corporate logos and mascots at as young as six months of age and can establish brand loyalty by as young as two years old; by the time these children enter school they can recognize hundreds of logos and brands (How Marketers Target Kids, 2005). This is incredibly important because by the time they are six years of age, they would have been exposed to various product stimuli.
Section 2: Why do fads exist?
Section 2: Why do fads exist?

One of the fundamental qualities of fads is that they are entirely customer-driven. It is this characteristic that gives a product the status of a fad and allows it to flourish. Although marketers may attempt to create and manipulate fads, it is the customers who determine whether a product will be propelled to fad status.

Consumers use fads to express their identity. However, because different consumers adopt fads at different times, the identity that a consumer seeks differs, depending on what stage of the adoption process he or she participates. Initially, the fad is adopted by individuals as a means to differentiate themselves from the rest of the population. However, when the fad is accepted by the masses, laggards begin to participate as a means of becoming connected to a greater network of their peers. Eventually, all adopters of a fad are psychologically and sociologically interconnected and form a temporary community of their own. Early adopters of one fad may move on to another phenomenon. Raugust (1998) states that “in the initial stage of adoption, participants want to be different from the rest of society, which their association with the fad allows. As later adopters migrate toward the fad, however, it becomes more mainstream, and the innovators and early adopters leave in favor of other non-mainstream phenomena… Later adopters… want to conform with societal norms” (p. 91). This conceptual dichotomy is intriguing because it demonstrates how the fickle nature of the masses makes fads difficult to predict.

Fads also exist as a means for consumers to escape from daily routines. Also, unlike the functional purpose of traditional products, fads do not have to be
utilitarian; they can exist just to add fun and excitement to someone’s life and allow them to escape the monotony of life. Again, to quote Raugust (1998), “a trivial craze can represent an escape from serious problems facing society at the time of its rise” (p. 91).
Section 3: How do fads differ from traditional products?
Section 3: How do fads differ from traditional products?

Although the definitions presented above highlight the general qualities of fads, they only address fads on a superficial level. In order to gain a greater understanding of what constitutes a fad, the definitive characteristics of fads should be divided into pre-emergent and post-emergent attributes. The division of these qualities will assist in predicting the likelihood of a product becoming a fad and assist in the identification of a product as a fad when it is in its earliest stages.

The pre-emergent characteristics are natural to the product and are easier to identify prior to the product becoming a fad. The pre-emergent qualities of fads are that they are simple for consumers to grasp and possess some level of uniqueness and oddness. If a marketer can obtain a better understanding of what items have the potential to develop into fads, they can gain an advantage over their competitors and have a greater chance of reaping any initial benefits that that a fad may generate.

Post-emergent characteristics are those qualities that are not seen until the fad has taken off. According to Raugust (1998), when post-emergent characteristics “are identified quickly, they can provide managers with an early competitive advantage. Not all fads exhibit all of the characteristics, but the majority possess many of them” (p. 5). The post-emergent qualities of fads are that they possess a high level of participation, high awareness, quick acceptance, short life span, and are consumer driven.

With the definition of a fad and the fad characteristics all identified, it would now be beneficial to differentiate the fad from traditional products. The
ability to differentiate traditional products from fads will allow marketers to make improved and early judgments about a new development. Letscherer (1990) points out that there are several benefits in identifying a fad as a fad because a company can make a lot of money by moving quickly to reap the rewards of a fad and get out before the crest is reached. When fads are compared to traditional products, the major differences stem from life cycle duration, adoption rationale, and predictability.

As previously established, fads have often been characterized as possessing a relatively short life cycle as a result of their fast rise, quick spread and saturation, and fast fall. According to Raugust (1998), though those statements are generally accepted and valid, they do not account for differences in “life cycle trajectories from fad to fad” (p. 56). Although some similarities exist, fads can often fit into one of four distinct life cycles. The four major life cycle patterns are true fads, cyclical fads, generational fads, and fads-to-franchise (these four life cycle patterns are depicted in Charts 2-5 of Appendix A). While marketers attempt to create franchises from fads, the true fad pattern remains the most common by accounting for 53% of the fads researched by the EPM study. True fads are usually used in comparisons with traditional products because they satisfy many of the fundamental qualities of fads and are the most common life cycle pattern.

True fads follow the pattern typically associating a fad item with fast rise, fast fall, and little lasting impact. Graph 2 of Appendix A shows the comparison of a true fad and a traditional product with respect to participation/awareness
levels over time. This graph shows how the participations/awareness level of true fads experiences a sharper rise and decline over time while traditional products experience a gradual climb and fall around their peak. The total life cycle of a fad is compressed in comparison to traditional products since several stages within the fad life cycle are significantly shorter.

Participation can usually be measured numerically (i.e., ratings or sales) with commercial fads. Graph 1 of Appendix A depicts the difference in sales over time for a fad item and a traditional product. The fad item reaches its sales peak and is in its descent in a shorter time frame than the traditional product. While the traditional product is progressing towards higher sales level, the fad has already experienced its maximum sales potential.

Other fads are more difficult to measure because there may not be a way to gauge how many individuals are actually participating in a particular fad; examples of such fads include dance crazes or social phenomena (such as streaking or phone booth stuffing). There are also cases in which participation is significantly higher than sales or retail figures. Board games are an excellent example of such occurrences because several individuals can participate in a particular game while only one unit was purchased. Raugust (1998) also states that “if many marketers are involved in a fad, total participation may also be hard to pinpoint exactly”\(^1\) (p. 5).

\(^1\) Interestingly, there is no point of reference which indicates when a product transforms into a fad. For instance, two products could accumulate varying sales figures (i.e., a faddish property with sales in the hundreds of thousands and a novelty fad with sales in the millions) and still both be considered legitimate fads. Similarly, fads for children between the ages of six and twelve can generate significantly higher sales than fads for teenagers or adults (Raugust, 1998). Two fads can also occur at the same time but have different levels of participation. Basically, there is no definitive benchmark in terms of sales or participation that defines when a product becomes a fad.
While traditional products may possess some practical benefits, fads do not necessarily have to serve a purpose. As previously noted, individuals may look to fads as a means to stand out. Kotler (1993) adds that “fads appeal to people who are looking for excitement, a way to set themselves apart, or something to talk about to others. Fads do not survive for long because they do not normally satisfy a strong need or satisfy it well” (p.331). The practicality of products can contribute to predicting success. Since consumer tastes are continuously fluctuating, fads can be more unpredictable than traditional products that serve practical uses. Additionally, fads are often inexpensive when compared to traditional products and therefore people are more willing to participate in the fad activity because it is an inexpensive investment.
Section 4: How do fads influence childhood behavior and development?
Section 4: How do fads influence childhood behavior and development?

4.1 Child Development:

Beginning as early as the 1930’s developmental biologist, Jean Piaget examined the dichotomy between nurture versus nature through his analysis of child development. Piaget developed four stages of intellectual development and supported the assertion that children did not think as adults and did not fully develop their brain functions until late adolescence (Defrates-Densch, 2002). The four stages of intellectual development are the sensorimotor stage (ages 0-2), the preoperational stage (2-7 years of age), the stage of concrete operations (begins around age 6 or 7-11), and the stage of formal operations (11-15 years of age).

Piaget’s theory asserts that there are predetermined ages at which children develop particular skills. However, since the formulation of Piaget’s theory, there have been various criticisms of his work as underestimating the development of children and the impact of the environment. According to Psychology Press (2004), a criticism of Piaget’s theory would be that children have the ability to solve problems and develop particular intellectual capabilities earlier than speculated by Piaget. Other criticisms of Piaget assert that he did not consider the potential influence of education, culture, and the overall environment on children; instead he assumed that children experienced the same development everywhere (Van Wagner, 2006). As a result, environmental factors such as marketing/advertising, parents, and peers can influence the development of a child. Ji (2002) supports this assertion by stating that “child-brand relationships
are influenced by a variety of social factors such as family (parents, siblings, and relatives), peers, and mass media. In the consumer socialization literature, these social factors are termed socialization agents, through whom children learn marketplace-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes.”

4.2 Marketers:

In addition to recognizing the potential benefits of the children’s market, marketers also realize that there are tremendous opportunities to reach children because of their ability to be influenced by their surroundings. Marketers can use traditional methods such as television commercials to forge early relationships with these young children in the hopes of creating an imprint in a child for their particular product. Moore (2004) supports this assertion by stating that “advertising thus has the power to shape children’s thinking until they acquire ‘cognitive and attitudinal defenses.’” Marketers can use this to their advantage and attempt to create fads around a particular concept in order to create an imprint in the child’s memory and persuade the child to desire that particular fad product. Interestingly enough, while this recognition of brands and logos has been established, the children are still too young to fully comprehend what such things actually are. According to Jones (2006), children do not really care about what they are playing with, wearing, or even eating and oftentimes view the product as something they like and are comfortable with. The marketing begins earlier and with a more subtle approach. Additionally, the potential benefits are increased for marketers because children do not care if a particular product is utilitarian.
Therefore, they will desire an item even if it does not satisfy a need or possess a practical function.

4.3 Parents:

Parents are also quite significant in terms of their influence on the development and behavior of a child. Smith (2001) makes an assertion that is valid in almost every household situation, “parents want to give their child every advantage that they can possibly afford.” These advantages go far beyond merely financial advantages and delve into the arena of social and emotional advantages. Parents can promote their child’s desires to participate in fad activity for various reasons. Each of the factors identified provides the momentum for a fad. The financial factors (e.g., working more hours) affect the household dynamic (e.g., parents spend less time in the house and less time with their children) and thereby create social and emotional factors outside of the home (e.g., more exposure and reliance to peer pressure on the part of the children and the potential for guilt on the part of the parents) that subsequently lead the parent to fulfill the child’s desire for fads.

Socioeconomic trends have contributed tremendously to a parent’s ability to afford fads. According to How Marketers Target Kids (2005), “parents today are willing to buy more for their kids because trends such as smaller family size, dual incomes and postponing children until later in life mean that families have more disposable income.” Basically, since some parents can afford more, they are willing to spend more.
Some parents may work to maintain their level of income while others such as single parents may work to survive or make ends meet. In both cases, this usually means that the parents are working more and are spending less time in the home. Consequently, their children are increasingly searching for new sources of influence and support, particularly individuals within the child’s peer group.

Haley (2004) states that:

[according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it is estimated that approximately one out of every 10 children in grades 4 through 12 is or has been a latchkey kid (a child who returns to empty homes and are responsible for his/her well-being and entertainment until their parents arrive). The average amount of time a child is home alone either before or after school is approximately two to three hours.]

She continues on to say that these children often experience some level of internal conflict such as self-esteem issues and resentment towards parents and younger siblings.

The parental absence from the home, for whatever reason, contributes significantly to parents’ support of their child’s fad activity. Parents indulge their children’s fad activity because of their own guilt, desire to help their child make friends, and because they have lost track of their children’s activity.

Parent may feel tremendous guilt for their absence from the home. These parents will use financial means as a way to make up for their deficiencies in other areas. *How Marketers Target Kids* (2005) supports this affirmation by stating, “guilt can play a role in spending decisions as time-stressed parents
substitute material goods for time spent with their kids.” Children are often aware of this notion and can take advantage of this in terms of getting the fad item they desire.

Additionally, since parents are not around their children, there is a greater likelihood that they are unaware of their child’s activities. Paul (2001) states that “parents who flinch at the products that catch their children’s attention often capitulate either due to a lack of information or simply because their children (who are more monied than ever) might simply buy the item for themselves.” As a result, parents are often reluctant to take a stand against fads. Because they are unsure about what other kids are up to or what is really going on at school, many parents end up accepting their children’s judgment. Bilgrey (2002) asserts that “parents often feel like they no longer know who their kids are.” Other parents are unwilling to squander what little time they have with their kids on battles about clothing, food, movies, and other issues. Parents want the time that they do spend with their children to be pleasant and conflict free. According to Rosenberg (2000), “especially in families with two working parents, moms and dads want to capitalize on the small amount of family time that’s available. They don’t want to argue…, so they are more likely to include tweens in the decision-making process.”

Parents also desire to assist their children in their socialization. With the realization of children tying self-worth and peer approval to possession of the latest product, parents help to promote their child’s participation in a particular fad. According to a poll conducted by the Center for a New American Dream,
more than half of the parents admitted to buying their children a particular item (even if they disapproved of it) “because their child wanted it in order to fit in with his or her friends” (Redefining Progress, 1999). In fact, Rauch (2005) rationalizes the need for parents to embrace a few fads by stating that “allowing your child to play with popular toys and watch popular television shows or videos can give her a way to communicate with peers. It helps them to have something to talk about.” Despite this assertion, there is still some literature which claims that parents should stay away from fads because “if your child really wants it, buy a smaller version and invest in toys that last longer” (Child Birthday Gifts, 2005).

4.4 Peer Pressure:

Peer pressure is one of the most critical environmental forces in terms of shaping the development, behavior, and desires of a child. It is extremely evident during childhood that children desire acceptance and feel that the best solution is to follow the crowd. Children’s Healthcare Services (1998) asserts that “wanting to do ‘what all the other kids are doing’ is part of growing up. Children naturally form groups by pre-adolescence, and the desire to ‘belong’ often produces a desire to conform.” These children see fads as a way to bring them closer to their peers and give them a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. According to The National Toy Council (2006), “peer pressure is an extremely strong force which begins once a child starts to mix with other children. The more time youngsters spend away from home and with other children, the more they experience peer pressure. Today’s children have greater awareness of new
products than previous generations because they socialize with children at a much earlier age.”

The need for acceptance is instrumental in a child’s reasoning for participation in fads. Raugust (1998) states that “children are highly influenced by peer pressure and word of mouth” (p. 32). According to The National Toy Council (2006), “youngsters create these fads amongst themselves.” As aforementioned, peer pressure is a major force in this as children desire to be popular and liked among their peers. The National Toy Council (2006) notes that “the urge to be liked, to belong to a desirable group of age-mates, is present in most of us whatever our age but is particularly strong in the young, who are, as yet, too inexperienced to strike out on their own, be judged on their own accomplishments and risk alienation from the crowd.” Phillips (1999) supports this assertion by pointing out that “preteens conform to peer pressure, trends, apparel tastes and so forth because they’re anxious to be accepted. They’re moving away from the need to be loved solely by their parents to the need to be loved and accepted by their peers.” As a result, children seek a safe way to be accepted in the form of imitating more popular peers. The clothing, musical tastes, and playthings of the popular children are usually the latest on the market; other children will emulate these possessions and activity of the popular kids and help to propel products to fad status, which may start at the local level and sometime spread nationally (The National Toy Council, 2006).

Fads for children transcend the boundaries of possessions and playthings and delve into the hierarchy of youth culture. Raugust (1998) point out that
“children view their participation in a fad as a status symbol- a trait that is present in most age groups, but even more for this group” (p. 32). This contributes tremendously to licensed merchandise and commercial tie-ins that are associated with a particular fad. According to the Consumers Union (1998):

[t]he purpose of licensing and cross-selling is to forge powerful links in the minds of young consumers between a favorite movie, TV show, or character and some product they might not want or notice otherwise…Licensing encourages kids to keep on buying, to get the latest fad, and chuck it when a newer one comes along.

In addition to being affected by their peers, children are also influenced by the trickle down fads from teenagers, particularly older siblings or babysitters. Children often want to feel older and one of the best ways to do this is to imitate the activities of their older siblings or other older individuals, particularly teenagers.

Interestingly enough, the increased commercial tie-ins that arise from the fad once it reaches a larger audience can help to drive the teen away. While these tie-ins and licensing mechanism may suck children deeper into the sphere of the fad’s influence, it deters teenagers “who want to be associated with the ‘in’ group among other teens, but prefer to be different from the rest of the population (especially their younger siblings)” (Raugust, 1998, p. 34).

As children attempt to participate in fad activity as a means of gaining acceptance and bolstering their status among their peers, children view their peers’ perception of them as a reflection of their self worth and self-esteem.
Children believe that participating in fads will not only increase their status in the eyes of their peers but will also help to enhance their feelings about themselves. Rice (2002) supports this assertion by stating that children “base self-esteem on being stylish” and as a result “clamor for the latest look.” Clay (2000) also reinforces this claim by stating that “children have become convinced that they’re inferior if they don’t have an endless array of new products.”

When fads are excessively used as a status symbol or self-esteem booster by children and purchased by parents to relieve guilty feelings, the effects of materialism can become increasingly prominent. Children are moving away from giving and into the mindset that believes everyone is there to serve them and give them all of their wants and desires. Oftentimes, their desires are focused on new and unique products such as fads. When children are able to receive all of their desired fad items, regardless of their conduct, and not as a means of positive reinforcement, parents are inadvertently (and in some cases consciously) contributing to their children’s materialistic attitude.

Children are also exhibiting habits of over-indulgence as they desire more and, as aforementioned, parents and other loved ones provide these wants, even if they are fads. I have observed this situation recently with my seven-year-old niece, Chyanne. Since I would be visiting her in a few weeks, I asked her if there was any toy that she really wanted. Her response began with one Bratz doll and quickly moved to two dolls, one male and one female, and then she finally declared that she “needed” four Bratz dolls, two males and two females. She reached this conclusion in less than a minute. It was now up to me to see if I
would oblige. Although this example primarily shows a child’s desire for more, it leaves out the idea of indulging those desires in order to point out that parents and loved ones still have influence and that they have the option to (1) purchase, (2) not purchase, (3) purchase less, or (4) purchase something different. As for this example, I decided to purchase less: she will get one Bratz doll, and I may also purchase something different, some type of educational tool (toy, book, etc.).

Another major issue with marketing fads to children is the concept of creating a culture not only of consumption but of over-sexualization. Fresco (2005) comments on the growing concern in America about what critics regard as the “sexualization” of some toys. It attests that fad toys, Bratz dolls in particular, are on “the cutting edge of a worrisome trend: the increasing use of sexual imagery in products marketed to young children” (Macpherson, 2005). The products can be marketed specifically to children, like Bratz, or through the trickle down effect as the product is marketed to teenagers but attracts their younger counterparts. Macpherson (2005) points out that “child development experts worry that such sex-saturated culture encourages children and young adults to define themselves mainly by how sexy they are, and to see sex as the most important quality in a successful relationship.” This assertion, along with the research regarding the amount of influence these products have on a child’s self esteem and peer approval, creates a situation in which children are increasingly susceptible.

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2 Although I had made this decision, my niece and I ultimately decided to purchase a completely different fad toy-- a doll from Build a Bear. The final purchase decision also highlights how a child’s desire for a particular fad can shift to another item.
According to Macpherson (2005), marketers respond to such allegations by contending that “today’s kids are growing up in a different world than their parents did and are savvier at younger ages. Some also complain that adults read too much into products that kids see merely as “fashion forward” or “cool.” They point to data showing a decline in teen pregnancies and an increase in the number of kids who wait longer to have sexual intercourse for the first time.” Ultimately, marketers place the onus on the parents to decide what is appropriate for their children to consume and watch.

With the burden of such effects on children being placed on the parents by the marketers, there are three primary issues to discuss:

The first is how effectively parents can combat the constant bombarding of consumerism directed at their children. Child development experts contend that the battle is uneven as parents are usually working and are unable to continuously monitor their children against the effects of companies who spend more than $15 billion a year on marketing to children (Macpherson, 2005).

Secondly, as aforementioned, parents may not be as proactive as they could be in curtailing any potential negative situations. Macpherson (2005) supports this assertion by stating that “the ubiquitous nature of sexual imagery and content has ‘de-sensitized parents’ to its impact on children…Parents ‘have come to accept such sexualized content as Britney Spears, Bratz dolls and professional wrestling females as a regular part of even young children’s environment.” Basically, some parents have just become complacent with the current events and refrain from any actions to reduce or regulate these activities.
Finally, there is the idea that marketers do not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Macpherson (2005) points out that “a lot of marketers are young themselves, and don’t really have the values perspective that is needed.”
Section 5: Can marketers create fads?
Section 5: Can marketers create fads?

Although marketers may try to create or influence fads, they cannot definitively determine the outcome of their actions because they cannot predict if a very large group of consumers will adopt the promoted product in a short time. As discussed earlier, it is the consumers who ultimately determine whether a product will be achieve a fad status.

Despite the actions of consumers, there are gatekeepers who can prevent a fad from reaching its full potential. Gatekeepers are entities that stand between the fad and its fan base such as retailers and reviewers (Raugust, 1998). For instance, if the fad is unable to reach consumers for reasons such as little media coverage, product unavailability, or poor exposure, the product may not reach its full demand potential and not have a chance to develop into a fad. This logic however, does not occur backwards. Despite the restrictions that gatekeepers can place on a fads potential, gatekeepers cannot cause a potential fad to succeed if there is no consumer interest (Raugust, 1998).

Fads can originate from various sources. Each of these fad sources has its own impact on the buying behavior of children. The pervasive need to participate in a particular fad activity can range from mass media and entertainment to the household or schoolyard environment.

Fads can be derived from entertainment and publishing. More specifically, fads can come from television and comic books (Raugust, 1998). These are two of the most basic sources in that they have the capacity to attract the attention of children and, if successful, attract licensing and tie-ins by
marketers and advertisers. Although many individuals may view advertisers and marketers as the root of all fads, this is not necessarily true. The National Toy Council (2006) points out that the popularity of such fads as Cabbage Patch Kids dolls, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles “was established long before any promotional advertising appeared for these products. Advertisers (and marketers) later capitalize on youth fads but they are not necessarily responsible for creating them.”

Another element that has been shown to contribute to the emergence of fads is the influence of celebrities and athletes. In the past, a particular product would be elevated to fad status because children would see a certain celebrity participating in the activity and desire to emulate that (especially if the fad was affordable). In fact, Bear (2004) points out that “the majority of tweens (94 percent) admit that seeing their favorite cartoon characters, movie star, singer, athlete or personality using a certain product brand makes them want to use that brand at least some of the time.” The realization of the connection between celebrities and athletes and children, particularly tweens, can be seen with the emergence of such child/tween/teen oriented publications such as Teen People, Sports Illustrated for Kids, and Time for Kids. It is easier for the tween (ages 8-12) segment of the overall children demographic to follow such figures because of their increased ability to recognize brands, need for acceptance, and increased disposable funds.

Despite the previous success of celebrities and athletes to influence the purchasing habits of children, their present ability has begun to wane. According
to Lee (2005), children view celebrities as less exciting than ever before and desire celebrities to be more multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Additionally, celebrities have to work harder to earn the respect of the children. This may be particularly significant for tweens who are likely to demand more from the celebrities and who may understand that a product worn or endorsed by a celebrity is not enough to make it cool or encourage them to purchase it. Basically, these children are becoming more sophisticated.

With all of the previous factors contributing to a fad’s popularity and emergence, the most important factors are the ones closest to the child. As previously mentioned, there are two levels of this proximity influence: (1) the trickle down fads from teenagers, particularly older siblings or babysitters and (2) peers. Interestingly, on both levels, the influence usually occurs between peers or siblings of the same gender. Therefore, an older brother is more likely to influence the fad activity of his younger male sibling or a group of girls will rely on each other for information on the latest crazes.
Section 6: Is the marketing of fads to children any different than marketing traditional products to children?
Section 6: Is the marketing of fads to children any different than marketing traditional products to children?

In order to compare the marketing of fads to the marketing of traditional products, I will divide this discussion on the basis of the four Ps of marketing: Product, Place (distribution), Price, and Promotion.

6.1 Product and price:

As aforementioned, traditional products and fad items differ in terms of product qualities and pricing. However, traditional products and fads are similar in terms of place and promotion.

6.2 Place and promotion:

Since there is tremendous potential for marketers in targeting the youth demographic, it would be beneficial for both marketers of traditional products and fads to attempt to capitalize on this particular demographic. These marketers use similar invasive methods and distribution channels to reach the children, particularly the use of psychologists, in-school advertising, the Internet, and children themselves.

6.2.1 Use of psychologists:

Marketers are now recruiting psychologists in order to get a better understanding of the mentality of children. How Marketers Target Kids (2005) comments on “the marriage of psychology and marketing” by declaring that “to effectively market to children, advertisers need to know what makes kids tick.” Rice (2002) supports this assertion by noting that “young people are exposed to some 30,000 ads—print, broadcast and otherwise. But marketers do more than
bombard kids with ads: Billboards, print ads, radio and television commercials, product placements, even movie trailers on home videos are all cleverly presented to appeal to their young psyches. In other words, the relentless manipulation of our children has become an art and a science, involving well-heeled research firms and the insights of experts in children and adolescent psychology.”

With the help of well-paid researchers and psychologists, advertisers now have access to in-depth knowledge about children’s development, emotional and social needs at different ages. Using research that analyzes children’s behavior, fantasy lives, art work, even their dreams, companies are able to craft sophisticated marketing strategies to reach young people.

6.2.2 Schools:

In response to the idea of the peers and peer pressure being the primary influencers on children’s purchasing decisions, some marketers have attempted to get within the walls of the school and reach children in their own element. With the current financial problems faced by schools, schools provide less protection from the influences of consumerism and consumption. According to How Marketers Target Kids (2005), “budget shortfalls are forcing school boards to allow corporations access to students in exchange for badly needed cash, computers and educational materials.” Marketers attempt to get their brands, products and properties to reach young students by surrounding them with advertisements through such activities as sponsorship, incentive programs, and classroom publications. With marketers’ knowledge of the increased recognition and receptiveness of children to advertising and the importance of exposure to
youth in order to propel children’s fads, placing advertisements in schools is an aggressive strategy to get closer to children in an environment in which they spend a considerable amount of their time.

In order to cut through the clutter that is constantly present in the lives of young people, marketers are using buzz marketing. Rice (2002) defines buzz marketing as “as a new twist on the tried-and-true ‘word of mouth’ method. The idea is to find the coolest kids in the community and have them use or wear your products to create a buzz around it.” As a result, marketers are not only able to break into the world of youths and the hierarchy of popularity but manipulate it. By understanding that it may not be the product but rather the person who is wearing it, they have taken advantage of the peer situation. Therefore, marketers are able to use this method to promote the latest fad items.

6.2.3 Internet:

The Internet is another area that marketers use to target children. According to How Marketers Target Kids (2005), the Internet is “an extremely desirable medium” for marketers to target children because:

- It is part of youth culture. This generation of young people is growing up with the Internet as a daily and routine part of their lives.
- Parents generally do not understand the extent to which kids are being marketed to online.
- Kids are often online alone, without parental supervision.
- Unlike broadcasting media, which have codes regarding advertising to kids, the Internet is unregulated.
Sophisticated technologies make it easy to collect information from young people for marketing research, and to target individual children with personalized advertising.

By creating engaging, interactive environments based on products and brand names, companies can build brand loyalties from an early age.

Additionally, buzz marketing is also well suited for the Internet. Marketers can utilize young “Net Promoters” who use newsgroups, chat rooms, and blogs to spread the word about the latest fads regarding music, clothes, and other products among unsuspecting users.

Marketers are also trying to draw children on to particular websites and persuade them to purchase products by using “advergames,” which are games sponsored by advertisers that have embedded brand messages and are on websites visited by children; by playing such games, brand awareness is reinforced and continued visitation of the website is encouraged (Moore, 2004).

6.2.4 Use of children themselves:

Marketers have recognized the importance of peer influence and are using children to spread the word about the latest products to their peers. Instead of using the anonymity of the Internet to appear as a child, marketers are using actual children. One particular method used by marketers involves targeting young girls in their bedrooms. Marketers have recruited “secret agents” to host slumber parties and invite their closest friends and show off the products of a particular manufacturer (CBS Worldwide, Inc., 2004). In this case, these girls are
being influenced by a marketer without realizing it and will be less skeptical because the pitch is coming from a close friend and individual they trust.
Section 7: Are there ethical issues in marketing fads that are different than marketing traditional products to children?
Section 7: Are there ethical issues in marketing fads that are different than marketing traditional products to children?

With the increased sophistication and influence of today’s children, the variety of media outlets and noise that attempts to influence the desires of children, and susceptibility of parents, marketers view this demographic as ripe for the taking by any means necessary. This is the problem… The means that marketers are using raise several ethical issues. Since marketers of traditional products and fad items utilize similar marketing methods, they are both engaging in questionable activities.

Although marketers are not considered the creator of fads and may not have the majority of the influence, they still possess a significant ability to persuade the youth culture and manipulate its environment. It is this power that concerns me because with such great power and influence comes great responsibility. However, some marketers are not taking accountability for their actions nor are they looking at the ethical ramifications on the demographic they are targeting and society as a whole.

*How Marketers Target Kids* (2005) points out that “the challenge for marketers is to cut through the intense advertising clutter in young people’s lives.” More than ever before, marketers are engaging in extreme and often questionable activities to get the attention of children. In some cases, marketers view children as mere statistics or dollars that contribute to the bottom line, or the latest area to compete over. According to Rice (2002), “youth-targeting firms are not merely in the business of supplying the ‘needs’ of their young customers; they
are engaged in molding their wants and desires, of creating artificial appetites and false necessities.”

Attempting to capitalize on the sensitive issues of child development and psychology can be ethically questionable. Rice (2002) has gone so far as to say that “marketers often understand children’s psyches better than parents and teachers do, thanks in part to the research they buy, and thanks in part to the consultants trained in child and adolescent psychology.” Rice (2002) continues that marketers use the information that they accumulated for “simple manipulation, appealing to the fears and appetites of those passing through the most vulnerable and impressionable phase of their lives.” The behavior became so flagrant that on September 30, 1999, approximately sixty teaching and practicing psychologists wrote a letter to the President of the American Psychological Association (APA) in which “the signers expressed their disgust at the degradation of their profession, one intended ‘to mitigate the causes of human suffering,’ not help corporations” (Rice, 2002). These signers also called for an amendment to the organization’s ethical code in order to limit what psychologists can do with their knowledge. Basically, they called for a curb on the abilities of psychologists to sell themselves to advertisers and marketers. In response to this incident, the APA composed a task force to evaluate the issue and provide recommendations.

Some of the Internet activities utilized by marketers are also particularly worrisome because of the lack of Internet regulation in terms of advertising, the lack of parental supervision or comprehension of Internet activity, and the idea of
deceiving children by using the anonymity of the Internet to reach out to children and be ever-present in their environment.

The final issue is the most upsetting because children are somewhat naïve and trusting regarding Internet activity. Oftentimes, children consider Internet messages to be truthful and the Internet to be a harmless means of creating and maintaining relationships with peers. This overly trusting perception can be seen with the emergence of such social networks as Myspace.com and Facebook.com (which allow youths to post personal information about themselves) as well as in academia where students utilize information from various Internet sites and fail to consider the credibility of the source. When marketers attempt to contact children on the Internet, children often assume the messages they encounter to be honest and legitimate rather than a mere marketing ploy.
Conclusion
**Conclusion:**

In summation, various concepts have been highlighted throughout this examination. By providing information on assorted aspects of fads as well as focusing on fads in relation to a particular demographic and in comparison to traditional products, this study has surpassed the usual minimal attention that is paid to the subject. The analysis of the relationship between fads and children also highlights various social situations and implications with regard to children, parents, marketers, schools, and the government. In order to provide an overview of the major points of this discussion, I will revisit each research question and its response.

- **What are fads and why are they important to study?**

  Fads are simply short-lived items that are enthusiastically accepted by a large part of the population. Fads are important because they have the potential to generate a significant amount of money. Fads also have the ability to unite people through their participation in a particular fad activity. Fads that are promoted to the children’s demographic have even greater potential because of the increased spending power, purchasing influence, and susceptibility of children.

- **Why do fads exist?**

  Fads exist because consumers are always looking for novelty and ways to differentiate themselves from others. Fads are a way to visually distinguish an individual from others. These products are propelled to their fad status by the demand and desires of the masses and are inherently unpredictable because of the fickle nature of consumers.
How do fads differ from traditional products?

In comparison to traditional products, fads are short-lived, utilitarian, unpredictable, and relatively inexpensive. Since traditional products usually serve some function, they are more predictable and resistant to changes in consumer needs. These traditional products can also be placed at a higher price point in comparison to fads because consumers are willing to pay for practical products.

How do fads relate to childhood behavior and development?

Children often seek peer group approval for both their behavior and products to use. Fads are created by acceptance of certain groups and these groups act as a reference for other children. Children view their perception by peers as a reflection of their self worth. As a result, children feel that the possession of fad items can boost their self esteem.

Can marketers create fads?

Marketers cannot truly create fads because of the unpredictable nature of consumers. However, marketers may attempt to capitalize on fads after they are on the market. Additionally, gatekeepers can also influence the effectiveness of a fad by altering its presence in or exposure to the market.

Is the marketing of fads to children any different than marketing traditional products to children?

Traditional products and fad items differ in terms of product qualities and pricing. However, traditional products and fads are similar in terms of place and promotion, particularly in regards to the youth demographic. Marketers use similar invasive methods and distribution channels to reach the children, primarily
with the use of psychologists, in-school advertising, the Internet, and children themselves.

- Are there ethical issues in marketing fads that are different than marketing traditional products to children?

  The marketing of fads raises the same ethical issues as the marketing of traditional products with regards to the youth demographic. Both of these methods have some strategies that can be considered ethically questionable as a result of their invasive nature.

  After researching and composing this study on fads, I have learned a tremendous amount not only about fads in general and fads and their connection to children, but also the deeper social issues surrounding these general topics such as the increased influence of children on the purchasing behaviors of their family, the parental dilemma of balancing the pursuit of economic goals with the time spent with children, the disparity of schools as they struggle to maintain appropriate funding, and the behavioral and social effects on children as a result of these elements.

  Although some of the methods used to market fads to children may be ethically questionable, it is important to remember that the fads themselves can be positive. In general, fads can provoke fond memories of the past or help individuals to feel that they were a part of something greater than themselves. According to Ji (2002), this situation describes the consumer-brand relationship called “Childhood Friendship, a relationship that is affectionately laden and reminiscent of earlier times, yielding comfort and security of one’s past self.”
can recall when I walked through the streets of Midtown Manhattan with a handful of hula hoops for a volunteer project and was greeted by several business people and professionals who expressed their nostalgic feelings and their desire to play with the hula hoops.

In the context of children, fads can simply make children happy. When children first receive a particular fad item, they are happy regardless of how they received it. When I was in the fifth grade and received the Power Ranger action glove, I can remember the elation that I felt and the pleasure that I experienced as I played with it. At that moment, I did not care what influenced me to desire that fad or my parents to purchase it.

Additionally, it is also important to point out that all marketers are not bloodsucking business people who ignore the consequences of their actions and place the profits before the people. Many marketers do recognize that they do have some influence in the area of child development and behavior. According to Meyers (2005), “Marketers are parents and concerned citizens, too… People in this industry generally want to do what’s right, fair and responsible for children.”

**Recommendations:**

**Marketers:**

One cannot ignore the tremendous potential that the children’s demographic has to offer and the importance of capitalizing on the benefits that can be obtained from it. However, the problem with marketing fads (or traditional products) to children is the ability to utilize appropriate methods of reaching children.
Marketers should definitely continue to pursue the children’s demographic but use a more socially acceptable approach. For instance, marketers could look to some of the philosophies of social marketing in terms of marketing food items. According to Kraak (1998), “social marketing originates from marketing theory with one important difference – changes in a population’s behavior result in the ‘profits’ for individuals and society.”

Additionally, there are various regulatory organizations that have established reasonable suggestions to marketers as they promote products to children. For instance, “under provisions of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), any Web site that specifically targets or attracts children under age 13 must post a privacy policy explaining what information is collected and whether it’s disclosed to third parties” (Dobrow, 2002).

The Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) of the Better Business Bureaus has also established such some guidelines for advertising to children under 12 years old. The general guidelines of the CARU are as follows: Advertisers (and marketers) should be cognizant of “the level of knowledge, sophistication and maturity of the audience to which the message is primarily directed” (Children’s Advertising Review Unit, 2003, p. 3). Since children are more susceptible to certain marketing approaches and messages, they should take accountability for their activities and take action “to protect children from their own susceptibilities” (Children’s Advertising Review Unit, 2003, p. 3). Marketers and advertisers should not attempt to reach children directly if the

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3 Please refer to Appendix D for the link to the full list of COPPA regulations.
4 Please refer to Appendix D for the link to the full list of CARU guidelines.
content or product is inappropriate. The messages being marketed to children should be carefully implemented and truthful. Marketers should also incorporate an assortment of groups in their advertisements in order to promote diversity. Finally, the CARU guidelines clearly state that the prime responsibility of providing guidance to children lies with the parents. As a result, marketers and advertisers should attempt to constructively contribute to the parent-child relationship. If these guidelines were implemented and followed by marketers and advertisers, I believe that they would help curb some of the concerns regarding the current approaches utilized to reach children. These guidelines are clear and concise and directly discuss issues of child development, public perception, and accountability.

*Parents:*

Although marketers may use significant resources to reach children, parents can still help to protect their children from invasive marketing tactics. Despite the resources and creativity of marketers, parents can still influence their children. The best way for parents to curb negative marketing and any potential negative outcomes would be by attempting to decrease their children’s attention to such activities and attempt to boost their self-esteem. Parents can attempt to find a balance between their commitments outside of the home (i.e., work) and inside the home (i.e., spending time with their children) and the pressures to satisfy their child’s current desires, particularly fads, with the child’s long term well being. Some suggestions for parents include communicating with children,
designating parent-child time, and enrolling their children in extracurricular activities.

Since peer pressure is also a major influence on children, parents must attempt to be open to communication with their children. Panaccione (2005) suggests teaching children “from an early age to make good decisions.” Parents can also help by educating their children about their status as consumers and encourage them to talk about the topic. According to Goldstein (1998), there is evidence that is consistent in showing that “the effects of media are minimized when parents talk to children about them;” although consumer education does not prevent succumbing to persuasion, it will help parents to show children “the role that advertising plays in the economy” and “make informed choices.” Communication between parents and children will also help children to differentiate between reality and advertising.

Although parents have several obligations, it is important that they designate time to spend with children. This will foster the lines of communication, help the child parent relationship, and hopefully reduce the influence of fad items.

Extracurricular activities can help students to gain self esteem and allow them to engage in constructive activities. If children can feel better about themselves through such activities then they may place less reliance on the purchase and possession of fads. They may come to realize that the possession of fads does not define who they are.
Although parents may feel like they are fighting a losing battle against marketers and other outside influences, they possess more influence than they think. Bodnar (2000) support this assertion by stating that “when parents choose to emphasize values, they still have influence with their kids, even in the face of peer pressure and predatory marketers.”

**Final Thoughts**

Now that I've studied fads and children I can see their usefulness to a child's social development and sense of belonging but also see the possibility of how this need can be manipulated by marketers. As with all marketing efforts directed toward children, it requires a common sense collaboration between parents and business to do what is in the best interest of the child.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Graphs

Graph 1: Comparison of Fads vs. Traditional Product

Graph 2: True Fad

Graph 3: Cyclical Fad

Graph 4: Generational Fad
Graph 5: Fad-to-Franchise

![Graph 5: Fad-to-Franchise](image)
## Appendix B: Tables

### Table 1: Commercial Fads, by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property-Based</th>
<th>One-item (Multiple Marketers)</th>
<th>One-item (Proprietary)</th>
<th>Thematic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EPM

### Table 2: Prices for One-Item Fads (Both Proprietary and Multiple Marketer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than $1</th>
<th>$1 to $4.99</th>
<th>$5 to $9.99</th>
<th>$10 to $14.99</th>
<th>$15 to $19.99</th>
<th>$20 and up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EPM

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Appendix C: Charts

Chart 1: Total Life Span of Fads

Total Life Span of Fads

- Less Than 1 Year, 14%
- 1 Year, 36%
- 2 Years, 21%
- 3 Years, 11%
- 4 Years, 5%
- 5 Years, 6%
- More Than 5 Years, 7%

Chart 2: Commercial Fads, by Type

Chart 3: Prices for One-Item Fads (Both Proprietary and Multiple Marketer)
Appendix D: Regulatory Documents

CARU and COPPA Guidelines

- Link to CARU Guidelines:

- Link to COPPA Guidelines:
  http://www.coppa.org/coppa.htm