

# Marketing to Children : A Reflection of Institutional Psychopathy

\* *T. Raja Reddy*

\*\* *E. Lokanadha Reddy*

\*\*\* *T. Narayana Reddy*

## Abstract

Children buy products, pester their parents to buy, and are potential future buyers. Such potential profitability has attracted the attention of marketers, who aggressively target children in their quest for markets and products. Marketers disregard the human aspects in the process of exploiting the vulnerabilities of children, leading us to the argument that 'marketing to children' is a reflection of 'institutional psychopathy'. Psychopathy or antisocial personality disorder involves major abnormality characterized by lack of empathy, inappropriate behaviour, and indifference to rights and feelings of others. When businesses, the powerful institutions of our society, exhibit these characteristics, they are termed 'institutional psychopaths'. In this paper, the diagnostic checklist for antisocial personality disorder issued by the American Psychiatric Association in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* was applied to argue that marketers targeting children are in fact psychopaths, exhibiting psychological abnormalities. On application of the checklist, it was found that marketers targeting children scored a perfect seven on the diagnostic checklist, a definite reflection of 'institutional psychopathy'.

**Keywords:** business ethics, marketing ethics, marketing to children, institutional psychopathy

Paper Submission Date : July 14, 2016 ; Paper sent back for Revision : August 4, 2016 ; Paper Acceptance Date : September 30, 2016

In 1932, the American psychologist Edward Chace Tolman said, “Give me a child from any background and I'll turn him into anything you want - a scientist, politician, or even a criminal” (Dumont, 2001, p.44). Though Tolman and his theory of manipulative education never achieved intended results, his methods are discretely emulated by marketers to turn children into consumers (Dumont, 2001). Children buy products, pester their parents to buy, and are potential future buyers, together making them an important demographic for marketers (“How marketers target kids,” 2015). Such potential profitability has enforced the view of childhood as an economic construct and has attracted the attention of marketers, who are aggressively targeting children in their quest for markets and products (Hadijphani, Hadjiphani, & Christou, 2009). Marketers are making all out efforts to tap this market in the form of print and television advertising, product placements, sales promotion, packaging design, public relations, in- store, in-school marketing, and so forth. Marketers aim to attract the very young and hope to retain them for the rest of their lifetime.

Children exhibit unique vulnerabilities and are defenseless against the sophisticated onslaught of marketers. Children neither understand the persuasive intent behind various marketing activities nor can they distinguish between realistic and truthful claims of marketers and their creative lies (Department of Children, School and

---

\* *Research Scholar*, JNTUA & \**Associate Professor*, Department of Management Studies, Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering & Technology, Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. E-mail : rajareddy.78.t@gmail.com

\*\* *Professor*, Department of Management Studies, Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering & Technology, Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. E-mail : elreddy123@gmail.com

\*\*\* *Assistant Professor*, Department of Humanities, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh. E-mail : tnreddyjntua@gmail.com

Families, 2009). The self-interested marketers exhibit blatant disregard for human aspects in the process of exploitation of these children for profits and compromise the safety and well-being of children. They are hurting children through their actions and products, thus jeopardizing the very future of our children. For Bakan (2004), the 'legal person' called corporation, sufficiently aided by its marketers, is valorizing self-interest and invalidating moral concerns by exploiting children under the guise of marketing to them. He further said that such a 'personality' in human beings is abhorred and is termed as psychopathic, yet, curiously, we accept a corporation to be the society's most powerful institution- business. In this article, we examine the psychopathic nature of businesses targeting children in their greedy quest of maximizing profits.

## Psychopathy

According to Schouten and Silver (2012), psychopathy or antisocial personality disorder involves major abnormality characterized by lack of empathy, inappropriate behaviour, and indifference to rights and feelings of others. They also noted that for a psychopath, nothing is more important than meeting his/her own needs at the time and such a person conveniently ignores existing social, legal, and moral standards, along with the potential consequences of his/her actions. Schouten and Silver asserted that the moral compass of a psychopath is absent, or if present, is always pointing in the direction of self-interest. And unlike us, the psychopaths just don't care about the differences between right and wrong, and are only concerned with what is right for them. They also observed that psychopaths target the vulnerable, steal from the unwary and deceive the weak, and do not experience any remorse.

📌 **Institutional Psychopathy** : When businesses, the powerful institutions of our society, exhibit the characteristic traits of a psychopath, they are termed as 'institutional psychopaths'. Bakan (2004), in his influential book *The Corporation*, observed that the corporation, led by its marketers, itself may not so easily escape psychopath diagnosis as its actions are singularly self-interested and are unable to feel genuine concern for others in any context. According to Robert Hare, an expert on psychopathy, as quoted by Bakan, many of the attitudes people adopt and the actions they execute when acting as corporate operative (read as marketing operatives in the context of this article) can be characterized as psychopathic. For corporations, profits are the only legitimate mandate and human beings are mere tools to generate as much profits as possible ; tools that can be used when wanted or thrown away if they don't want it (Bakan, 2004).

For good reasons, much attention has recently been drawn towards the negative effects of marketing various products and services to children and the resulting consequences. However, little attention has been paid to understand marketing to children itself as a form of deviant behaviour focused on targeting and exploiting the vulnerable. There is a definite need to question the existence of marketing to children in its current form. In this article, the diagnostic checklist for antisocial personality disorder issued by the American Psychiatric Association in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*, listing the characteristic traits of psychopathy, is applied to marketers targeting children to make our case that marketing to children can be seen as a reflection of institutional psychopathy that has negative effects on children's well-being.

## Application of the Diagnostic Checklist

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the following is the diagnostic checklist for anti-social personality disorder (psychopathy) (American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-IV-TR*, 2000) :

**(1)** Failure to conform to social norms, with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest.

- (2) Deceitfulness as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure.
- (3) Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead.
- (4) Irritability and aggressiveness are indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults (instrumental aggression).
- (5) Reckless disregard for safety of others.
- (6) Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor final obligations.
- (7) Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from others.

A 'yes' for three or more characteristics is indicative of psychopathic behaviour. Let us apply the checklist to prove our case that marketing to children is a definite reflection of the psychopathic nature of businesses.

**(1) Failure to Conform to Social Norms :** Nowhere else we will find such an utter disregard for social norms as in the case of marketing tobacco to children. It has been long proven that tobacco consumption has negative effects on children. In spite of numerous settlement suits and laws that have been framed to curtail tobacco marketing to kids, marketers continue to entice and addict kids (Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, 2015). The consequences are potentially dangerous - estimated 5.6 million of American kids alive today will die with tobacco related illnesses (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Various internal tobacco industry documents, submitted to courts during trials, clearly reflect the psychopathic nature of these corporations, who treat childhood as an economic construct and children as economic instruments of profit. A R. J. Reynolds document (1984) infamously referred to young people as “the only source of replacement smokers” for those who quit smoking or died from tobacco related diseases. A Philip Morris document (1981) stated, “Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer” (p.1). Similarly, a Lorillard Tobacco document (1978) stated, “The base of our business is the high school student”.

Their actions followed their thoughts. The tobacco industry made all-out efforts to circumvent the marketing restrictions imposed on them and spent heavily on instore marketing (Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, 2012). This instore marketing campaign was effective at reaching kids because two-thirds of teenagers visit a convenience store or neighbourhood retail outlet at least once a week (Henriksen, Feighery, Wang, & Fortmann, 2004). According to Tobacco Industry Watch Report released by Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (2012), the tobacco industry used its ingenuity to make smoking even more appealing to kids by introducing flavoured cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. At this juncture, it is worth quoting the words of former U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company representative who stated that, “Cherry Skoal is for somebody who likes that taste of candy, if you know what I am saying” (Freedmen, 1994, p.1). Tobacco companies also suggest to kids that smoking makes them popular, feel attractive, take risks, and helps them avoid or manage stress (National Cancer Institute, 2008). The blatant violation of the norms laid down by society by tobacco companies (which is affecting the health of future generations by inducing them to smoke) by itself indicates the psychopathic nature of tobacco corporations in particular and businesses in general.

Young people are relentlessly bombarded with commercials of various alcoholic products (Strasburger, 2004). According to a study by JAMA Pediatrics (Worland, 2015), alcohol advertising leads children to drink for the first time or drink more if they are experienced underage drinkers. Further, those who start drinking early in their life are more likely to become alcoholics, than those who start drinking later in their life (Grant & Dawson, 1997). Today, underage drinking accounts for a substantial amount of alcohol sales, leading to many deaths and other harmful events (Milla, Levy, Spicer, & Taylor, 2006). Surrogate advertising to promote alcohol related products is another example of marketers' failure to adhere to social norms or lawful behaviour. Surrogate advertising is the strategy

used by marketers to promote a product in the guise of another, when the advertisement of the former is banned by the law of the land. Advertisers use packaged water, soda, fruit juices, audio CDs, cricket cases, etc., as surrogates to promote liquor brands. In India, major brands including Kingfisher, Bacardi, Bagpiper, Smirnoff, Seagram's, Royal Challenge, Royal Mist, etc. have used their inventiveness in advertising these products. These advertisements are telecast during various times, across all channels, which include sports and entertainment channels, hugely popular with kids. The psychopathic nature of marketers of alcoholic products makes them ignore the significant social costs associated with marketing alcoholic products to kids and young adults.

The other areas where marketers have posed a threat to the existing social norms include crushing childhood (treating kids as miniature adults), increasing the gender divide (there is nothing common between a boy and girl), sexualization of childhood, objectification, increased materialism, and so forth. This attitude of the corporations, their products, and marketing challenge the society and its general well-being.

**(2) Deceitfulness for Personal Profit or Pleasure :** Much of the advertising today is a bundle of undiscovered lies. With sophisticated tools and access to unending resources, marketers target children, turning misinformation into profit. Deception, by which we mean words or conduct intended to induce false beliefs in others (Deception, Def.1, 2016), plays a complex role in human life. It is used regularly and skillfully by marketers to attract children and make them buy their products and services. Deception is much more than lying, including actions and omissions, as well as words and strategic silences, used by the deceiver to create false impressions in others' minds (Alexander & Sherwin, 2003).

Children less than 8 years of age are cognitively and psychologically defenseless against advertising (Committee on Communications, 2006). They don't understand the persuasive intent of advertisers and accept advertisement at face value (Macklin & Carlson, 1999). As children don't understand the intent behind advertising, all advertisements can be classified as deception. Even the Federal Trade Commission (1989) considered advertising to children less than 6 years as unfair and deceptive, the fact conveniently ignored by marketers.

One of the common deceptive techniques used by marketers in advertising to children is puffery. Puffery refers to those exaggerated claims by the marketers that children are bombarded with every day – like, 'world famous drink' or 'the best in the world'. Though receiving more scrutiny than before, puffery is still a widely prevalent practice among marketers. Through the free market concept of *Caveat emptor*, let the buyer be aware, the marketers make customers responsible for what they believe in, irrespective of what is said to them. Application of such a concept to children will be potentially dangerous as they cannot make a reasonable assessment of what is said to them by the advertisers or marketers (Andreasen, 1993).

Marketers deceive the kids by confusing them. In a research article published in JAMA pediatrics (Bernhardt, Wilking, Gottlieb, Emond, & Sargent, 2014), the packaging and presentation of healthy foods proved confusing for most children, with fast food retailers designing healthier products to mimic the look of their standard range. For example, Burger King sells 'Fresh Apple Fries' in a box that looks the same as a french fry box, albeit with a small graphic of an apple on the front (Laffernis, 2014). Deception in advertising goes beyond just confusing the kids. Just look at the shocking truth behind the tantalizingly good looking advertisements of food items - using motor oil for honey, glue or shampoo as milk in cereal advertisements, brown shoe polish to colour hamburger, hair spray makes fruits and vegetables appear fresh, antacids and soap bubbles create fizz in soda, mashed potatoes stand in for ice-creams and meat, paper towels hold syrup on top of ice-cream, and spray deodorant makes grapes look fresh (Hillsberg, 2014).

**(3) Impulsivity or Failure to Plan Ahead :** Impulsivity, doing things or tending to do things suddenly and without careful thought (Impulsive, Def. 2, 2016), is a characteristic trait of marketers which is hidden and is difficult to expose. In his pioneering work, Wishnie (1977), author of the text, *The Impulsive Personality: Understanding*

*People with Distinctive Characteristic Disorders*, extensively discussed the salient characteristics of impulsive people as he saw them. Although Wishnie did not create a checklist, the subsequent authors who wrote on impulsivity prepared a 20-point check list attempt to sketch a brief profile of a typical impulsive person (Webster & Jackson, 1997). Let us apply this checklist to bring out the impulsive traits of marketers targeting children in their quest for profits :

**(i) Manipulation :** Impulsive people are commonly inclined to deceive others, to distort information, to make false claims, to persuade others into bad deals, to falsify statements, to promise more than is needed, and the like (Webster & Jackson, 1997). This almost looks like a narrative of the advertiser. According to Wishnie (1977), the impulsive person prides himself/herself on his/her ability to use and improve his/her skill of “conning”. Let us take an example of a marketer improving his/her skills of “conning”. Snicker maker Mars is mining behavioral data to pinpoint children in their weakest moments for snacking ; being happy, bored, or even stressed. This is done to open a window of impulsivity, a place or time where children are more likely to buy their chocolates (Southern, 2016).

**(ii) Distrustful :** Marketers, like people with high impulsivity, distrust their customers. They are under a constant feeling of insecurity that the customer will move on from them.

**(iii) Self-Protection Against Change :** Marketers have a strong self-protection against the change as in the case of a person with high impulsive behaviour. That is precisely the reason why they fail to change in spite of evidence based research and public outcry against advertising to children.

**(iv) Immediate Gratification:** According to Webster and Jackson (1997), for an impulsive person, it is necessary that demands be met right away, since he or she has no expectation that matters will be better in future. And if demands are not met, there may be a strong and excessive response. To get distinctly identified from the clutter, marketers create publicity and modes of attracting consumers that are essentially more aggressive, louder, bigger, noisier, more violent, more arresting, and more intrusive (Cage, 2012). These are desperate actions of marketers reflecting their impulsive nature.

**(v) Causes of Actions Unknown :** Impulsive people tend to be weak on personal awareness. They seldom reflect on their own selves because of anxiety and discomfort these induce (Webster & Jackson, 1997). Wishnie (1977) observed that it is easier for them to account for their conduct by pointing to factors that seeming lie outside their control. Precisely, this is the reason marketers fail to evaluate their own actions and the subsequent effect on children.

**(vi) Aggression Towards Friends/Family/Others :** According to Cage (2012), marketing aggression is a premeditated attempt to play on the 'unreasonable,' 'irrational,' or 'instinctive,' or 'compulsive' elements of human psychology. Marketers harass customers, stalk them, bore them, emotionally abuse them, and intimidate them through fear and shock appeal, all definite forms of instrumental aggression.

**(vii) Criticism Not Tolerated :** Marketing practitioners will never admit that their business takes away choice, gives people false expectations, causes frustration, feelings of lack of self-worth, colonizes visual space, and is a repetitive, relentless intrusion of misinformation and attention saturation with useless clutter (Cage, 2012). Marketers argue exactly the opposite. For them, marketing is a retail therapy, offers freedom of choice (Cage, 2012), and improves critical analysis (Bruce, 2014) of children, among others.

**(viii) Taxing Irresponsibility :** Wishnie (1977) established the idea that it is hard for a layperson to understand why



impulsive people commit destructive acts against others or against themselves. The same is true with marketers. Marketers' actions have destructive consequences among the vulnerable and these are conveniently neglected by them, a definite case of taxing irresponsibility on the part of marketers.

**(ix) Rejection Norms :** Marketers have blatant disregard for existing social and legal norms pertaining to marketing to children. Whether it is advertising alcohol or tobacco products, fast food marketing, over sexualization of childhood, crushing of childhood, objectification of children, promoting materialism, increasing the gender divide, promoting stereotypes etc., marketers have violated the existing social and legal norms on a continuous basis.

When we examine the words and actions of marketers through the lens of Howard Wishne, we can see definite evidence pointing to the impulsive nature of marketers in targeting children, which according to the American Psychiatric Association (2000) DSM-IV TR is a characteristic trait of a psychopath.

**(4) Irritability and Aggressiveness (Instrumental Aggression) :** As the saying goes, "Selling to children is as easy as nailing a nail in soap". The quote reiterates aggressive intent of the marketers. Anderson and Bushman (2002) defined human aggression as "any behaviour directed towards another individual that is carried out with proximate intent to cause harm"(p.28). Aggression can be essentially classified into hostile aggression (hot and irrational) and instrumental aggression (cold & premeditated) (Buss,1961). For Cage (2012), marketing itself is fundamentally the second type of aggression. It is premeditated and instrumental aggression aimed at achieving some specified goal. She cited the language used in academics and popular discussions in marketing and observed that they are filled with violent connotations, a clear depiction of aggression. Whether it is ambush, drivers, entry methods, embedding, explosiveness, flash mobs, flanking defense, fighting back, guerrilla marketing, intervention, mobilization, pre-emptive defence, targeting, weapons, the marketing strategy resembles a military strategy (Cage, 2012).

Marketers harass the public through their words and actions. Cage (2012) observed that the harassment of marketers consists of agitating, innervating, interrupting, nagging, poking, pestering, stimulating, all forceful activities that try to grab the attention of the child. Such harassment is usually persistent and repetitive.

Another form of aggression marketers regularly exhibit is stalking. Under the guise of knowing the children, they stalk them. They know where the child lives, which school the child goes to, what games does he/she likes to play, who are his/her parents, who are his/her friends, where does he/she go for shopping, what are his/her favourite foods, what are his/her favourite pastimes, what are his/her favourite books, who are his/her favourite authors, and many more intimate things about the child. Such an understanding about the child is used as input in designing sophisticated marketing campaigns targeting the children - a way to "hunt them down".

Marketers also play the role of torturers. Cage (2012) argued that marketing is not only torturous because it is repetitive or targeted, but also because it operates on the threshold of pain and tolerance. She observed that the psychological torture induced by the marketer breaks down the human mind through a powerful assault on the victim's "basic conditions for mental survival". And then, like a false friend, marketers offer their products or services as a way out of this torture. She also noted that marketers elicit high levels of arousal without sufficient scope for readjustment. The effect of such a torture on a young person's mind could be devastating. Psychological torture is worse than the physical torture because if somebody breaks our leg or breaks our arm, that can heal. But if somebody breaks down our mind, you may never get it back (Kramer, 2010).

Marketers are also emotional abusers. We now accept that suffering on the basis of intimidation, the traumatizing of individuals, depriving them of love constitutes emotional abuse (Cage, 2012). Marketers "often" appeal to the primitive human emotion of fear in order to "activate a person's sense of risk and vulnerability" (LaTour & Zahra, 1989). Fear appeal is understood by marketers to be a particularly efficacious way of influencing consumer intentions for "...if the threat seems real and salient, one should feel an enhancement of value towards

such a product and increased desire to obtain it for one's peace of mind" (LaTour & Rotfeld, 1997). Cane (2012) stated that marketing messages focus on threats of bodily harm, financial disaster, or social consequences. This clearly shows that marketers use fear and other emotions to intimidate kids, and in the process, inconvenience them or harm them to fill their coffers. The argument that marketing using fear appeal is only unethical when the presented product does not eliminate the threat (Mohideen, 2009) does not hold good in case of children. Marketers try to colonize the minds of young kids with their messages and products. They literally try to "own" them. It is an unequal relationship of power, where the marketers are dominating vulnerable children and are forcing their way through by making them buy their products and services.

**(5) Reckless Disregard for Safety of Others :** Marketers employ callous and devious methods to manipulate the forming and vulnerable emotions of children, cultivate compulsive behaviour, and addle their psyches with violence, sex, and obsession (Bakan, 2011). In the process, they exhibit reckless disregard for the safety and well-being of these children. Whether marketing unhealthy products to children, recommending unhealthy dietary alternatives, presenting a distorted image of the body and self, sexualizing childhood, or driving them towards materialism, the questionable practices of marketers have all seriously compromised the physical and psychological safety of children.

In the past 30 years, the obesity rate among children has reached alarming levels (Institute of Medicine, 2006a). Research by Olshansky, Passaro, and Hershow (2005) indicated that obesity increases the risk for Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer, and hypertension. They also observed that due to increasing obesity rates, this generation of children may be the first in 200 years with a shorter life expectancy than their parents. In spite of evidence based research suggesting that advertising influences children's dietary preferences and their demand for junk food, marketers conveniently neglect the findings and spend huge amounts of money in the form of advertising budgets to target children (Committee on Communications, 2006 ; Eggerton, 2007 ; Institute of Medicine, 2006b). About 98% of all televised food ads seen by children are for foods high in sugar, fat, or sodium (Powell, Szczypka, Chaloupka, & Braunschweig, 2007). Further, marketers present a distorted image of the ideal body in their commercials leading to increased body dissatisfaction for both male and female adolescents (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002). As a result, children resort to unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).

Another area of serious concern with respect to advertising to children is the sexualization of childhood. For marketers, sex sells. It taps into deep feelings and emerging curiosities of children (Bakan, 2011). But there are serious costs associated with sexualization of childhood. Research links media sexualization to a series of tangible harms to girls: lack of confidence in and comfort with their bodies, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, distraction, shame, anxiety, self-disgust, unhealthy sexual attitudes and practices, and sexual problems in adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2007). Beyond the issues of selling unhealthy products and sexualization of kids, marketers promote materialism among kids. Materialism today is considered the hand -maid of profit making at any cost (Dash & Priya, 2004). Research has linked overly materialist attitudes in both children and adults to unhappiness, anxiety, and depression ; weakened emotional attachments ; less ability to empathize and cooperate with others ; and narcissistic, manipulative, and antisocial behavior (Kasser, 2002).

We have earlier in this article discussed the ill effects of marketing harmful products like alcohol and tobacco in the context of violating the social norms. Let us now discuss the same from the perspective of the damage it does to child health and safety. Early use of either tobacco or alcohol can result in long-term addiction, health problems, and premature death (American Public Health Association, 1992). There are staggering economic costs associated with tobacco and alcohol induced illnesses (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989 ; 1990). Alcohol-related trauma - including child abuse, auto crashes, violence, and drownings - is one of the leading causes of death among those aged 1 to 19 years (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, n.d.). Alcohol can also lead to academic and employment problems, high-risk behaviors, including unplanned sexual activity, and interpersonal difficulties (American Public Health Association, 1992).

**(6) Consistent Irresponsibility :** In the Statement of Ethics issued by the American Marketing Association (2016), marketers are expected to embrace the highest professional ethical norms and ethical values. It says marketers must do no harm, foster trust in the marketing system, and embrace ethical values. Let us discuss how each one of the ethical norms is violated by marketers in targeting children. It also helps us to understand the extent to which marketers are being irresponsible and insensitive to children's needs and levels of understanding.

**(i) Do no Harm :** The harmful actions of marketers in targeting children are well documented with adequate research support. The selling of harmful products like tobacco and alcohol, and the accompanying negative effects it has on children is well known and established. Yet, they continue to do the same. Marketers of prescription drugs employ creative methods to send the message to the children that there is a drug available to cure all ills and heal all pain, a drug for every occasion, including sexual intercourse (Robbins, 2016 ; Strasburger, 2004). Advertisers propagate the belief that beauty, happiness, and success can be gained through consumption (Harmon, 2001; Richins, 2004). This emphasis on the material ownership and acquisition distracts children from the intrinsic values that are assumed to genuinely matter in life, such as maintaining supportive relationships and establishing personal growth (Kasser, 2002). Advertising leads to increased self-objectification among women. Girls start to consider themselves as objects of pleasure for others (Collins & Lenz, 2011). Increased objectification among women is linked to eating disorders, low sexual and self-esteem, increased sexual risk taking and depression (Aubrey, 2006).

**(ii) Foster Trust in the Marketing System :** An actor promoting R. J. Reynolds's product asked a RJR executive as to why he does not smoke. He was told, "We don't smoke that sxxx. We just sell it. We just reserve the right to smoke for the young, the poor, the black, and the stupid" (Herbert, 1993).

This statement reiterates how the vulnerable sections of the population are exploited by the marketers. It is also a reflection of complete disregard of the marketers towards any kind of trust and good faith bestowed by their customers. No fair exchange can happen in such a relationship of might and the minor. Marketing to children is inherently deceptive because kids take things literally. They don't understand the persuasive intent until they are 8 years old, and their brain's capacity for judgement is not fully developed, making them vulnerable targets for marketing.

**(iii) Embrace Ethical Values :** The inherent deception in marketing to children makes any claims of honesty in the relationship a false claim. Their irresponsibility is evident in their promotion of harmful products to children. There cannot be any fairness in a relationship where the actions of one party (marketers) causes substantial damage to the other (children). There is no respect for the child in this relationship of the powerful (might) with the powerless (minor). Companies are neither transparent within their actions, nor with their intentions.

**(7) Lack of Remorse :** Marketers rationalize their actions directed towards children. They absolve themselves of any responsibility for the actions directed towards children and the subsequent effects of those actions. They want parents to take responsibility for their children: monitor what they watch and read, determine how they spend their free time, and educate them to become responsible and informed consumers (Advertising Educational Foundation, 2005). However, critics argue that parents are feeling overextended and under attack, thanks to the sheer amount of advertising streaming at their kids, making it impossible for parents to monitor (Hood, 2000).

Marketers call the cry to ban kid-directed marketing 'wrong-headed' and 'naive' (Hood, 2000). They argue that today's children live in a consumerist society and advertising results in providing the right information to the children and guiding them towards the right purchase. According to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, product commercials aired during children's programming are designed to "show the product's features and explain its benefits in terms understandable to children and sensitive to their special attitudes and



perceptions”(Advertising Educational Foundation,2005). This is an argument trying to bring forward the “good will” of the marketers. The intent behind most commercial advertising is better sales and better bottom lines, far away from anything that can be termed 'good'. They call it an expression of their commercial freedom (Kent,2013). Freedom at what cost? Freedom of marketers cannot jeopardize the well-being of children.

Advertisers argue that advertising finances children's programming on free-to-air television. They claim that 94% of the net revenues coming from advertising aimed at children are reinvested in children's programmes (Shah, 2010). They argue that if advertising to children is banned, the quantity and quality of children's programming will be declined; children would be likely to watch more adult media. This, in turn, would expose them to other types of inappropriate advertising and content (Schor, 2006). They want the public to believe that there is no other alternative method for investment in children's programming.

They come out with astonishing research findings. Nickelodeon has also done research showing that kids know their brands, know what marketing is all about, and are capable of critically evaluating the marketing they see (Hood, 2000). These are findings from a population which cannot even distinguish between programming content and commercial content. Marketers use creative arguments in their defence. In response to an editorial in *Advertising Age*, James Johnston of R. J. Reynolds argued that, “Advertising is irrelevant to a young person's decision to smoke”(Lindsay,1997, p. 88). This is a self-fulfilling argument in defence of tobacco marketing. This exhibition of lack of remorse, constant denial and rationalizing on the part of the marketers with respect to advertising to children, contrary to research evidence, is a characteristic trait reflecting their psychopathic nature.

## Conclusion and Implications

Marketers score a perfect seven on the diagnostic checklist for antisocial personality disorder through their sophisticated and targeted efforts in marketing to children. They blatantly violate the social norms intended to protect and nurture children. They circumvent the law in their greedy quest for profits. Their inherently deceptive nature is evident in targeting the vulnerable and defenseless children with highly sophisticated marketing campaigns. Marketers also use questionable practices to attract and retain children. The aggression of marketers is reflected in their constant harassment, stalking, torturing, boring, emotionally abusing, and intimidating children to buy their products and services. Though marketers clinically plan and execute marketing campaigns targeting children, their impulsivity is evident in their desperate actions. Marketers jeopardize the safety of children through their actions and products. Marketers neither acknowledge the harm to children resulting from their actions, nor do they take any responsibility for the same, in the process exhibiting consistent irresponsibility. They fail to fulfil their own self-proclaimed obligations, leave alone the larger social obligations. Like clinical psychopaths, marketers are in constant denial, consistently defending their actions in targeting children and in the process, exhibit no remorse.

Just imagine leaving a child in a room full of psychopaths, all alone. The very thought will be deeply disturbing for any parent. But that is precisely what is happening in the market place. Children are surrounded by 'institutional psychopaths,' who are willing to go to any extent to fulfil their desires, fuelled by their psychopathic instincts. Yet, all this is allowed to run under the guise of business - the powerful institution of our society. It is time to think and act, for the very future and well-being of our children is at stake.

This paper poses pertinent and timely questions to marketers, demanding introspective and corrective actions with respect to the marketing efforts directed towards children. It tries to build a narrative which would eventually draw the attention and support of various stakeholders, including government and the members of civil society, calling for tougher regulatory framework to monitor and restrict marketing directed towards children. Further, it calls for restraint from marketers in the form of increased self-regulation.

## Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

We did examine the psychopathic nature of marketers in targeting children through the lens of DSM-IV-TR, which on its own may not be sufficient to validate the deviant nature of marketers in targeting children and question their existence, but provides some definite evidence and reasons why this is an important vantage point from which we can assess the intent and the resulting behaviour of advertisers and marketers targeting children. In this paper, the 'legal person' called corporation was imagined to have a personality and thinking of its own, which might bring forth the arguments of 'creative imagination' stretched far away from reality. However, what we tried to do is to offer a perspective to understand and question the actions of marketers targeting and exploiting the unique vulnerabilities of children in their quest for profits.

Future research should focus on identifying the strategies for appropriate interventions (treatment for psychopathy) to protect children from the onslaught of marketers. Research should also focus on building an appropriate regulatory framework necessary to curtail the psychopathic instincts of marketers.

## References

- Advertising Educational Foundation. (2005). *Advertising to children*. AEF. Retrieved from [http://www.aef.com/on\\_campus/classroom/speaker\\_pres/data/3005](http://www.aef.com/on_campus/classroom/speaker_pres/data/3005)
- Alexander, L., & Sherwin, E. (2003). *Deception in morality and law*. Cornell Law Faculty Publications (Paper 854). Retrieved from <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/facpub/854>
- American Marketing Association. (2016). *Statement of ethics*. Retrieved from <https://archive.ama.org/archive/AboutAMA/Pages/StatementofEthics.asp>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR. - Criteria 301.7* (p. 706). Washington, D.C. : American Psychiatric Association.
- American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls*. Washington D. C. : American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-summary.pdf>
- American Public Health Association. (1992). *Advertising and promotion of alcohol and tobacco products to youth. Policy statements & advocacy: APHA*. Retrieved from <http://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/29/10/58/advertising-and-promotion-of-alcohol-and-tobacco-products-to-youth>
- Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2002). Human aggression. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53(1), 27-51.
- Andreasen, A. R. (1993). Revisiting the disadvantaged: Old lessons and new problems. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 12 (2), 270- 275.
- Aubrey, J. (2006). Effects of sexually objectifying media on self-objectification and body surveillance in undergraduates: Results of a 2-year panel study. *Journal of Communication*, 56 (2), 366-386. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00024.x
- Bakan, J. (2004). *The corporation: The pathological pursuit of profit and power*. New York: Free Press.

- Bakan, J. (2011). *Childhood under siege: How big business targets children* (Kindle Edition). London : The Bodley Head.
- Bernhardt, A. M., Wilking, C., Gottlieb, M., Emond, J., & Sargent, J. D. (2014). Children's reaction to depictions of healthy foods in fast-food television advertisements. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 168 (5), 422-426. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.140
- Bruce, W. (2014, Feb 24). The tricky business of advertising to children. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/advertising-to-children-tricky-business-subway>
- Buss, A. H.(1961). *The psychology of aggression*. New York: Wiley.
- Cage, M. (2012). *Marketing is violence - A user guide*. London: Not So Nobel Books.
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. (2012, March 21). *Warning to parents: How big tobacco targets kids today (Industry Watch Report)* . Retrieved from [http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what\\_we\\_do/industry\\_watch/warning\\_to\\_parents/](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what_we_do/industry_watch/warning_to_parents/)
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. (n.d.). *Still seeking replacements: How big tobacco targets kids today*. Retrieved from [http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/microsites/replacements/assets/2015\\_03\\_17\\_marketing\\_report.pdf](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/microsites/replacements/assets/2015_03_17_marketing_report.pdf)
- Collins, L. M., & Lenz, S. (2011). The end of innocence: The cost of sexualizing kids. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700180194/The-end-of-innocence-The-cost-of-sexualizing-kids.html?pg=all>
- Committee on Communications. (2006). Children, adolescents, and advertising. *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 118(6), 2563-9.
- Dash, C. K., & Priya, A. (2004). Ethical issues in marketing: A new dimension and challenge. *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 34(12), 9 - 13.
- Deception [Def. 1]. (n.d.). In *Merriam Webster Online*, Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deception>
- Department of Children, School and Families. (2009). *The children's plan. the impact of the commercial world on children's well being -report of an independent assessment*. United Kingdom: DCSF.
- Dumont, P. (2001). Temptation - Free television for children? *The UNESCO Courier*, 54(9), 44-46.
- Eggerton, J. (2007, May 18). *Food-marketing debate heats up; Congress to join FCC and FTC in pressing for action*. BC : Broadcasting & Cable . Retrieved from <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/CA6444875.html>
- Federal Trade Commission. (1989). *In the matter of children's advertising: FTC final staff report and recommendation*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Freedmen, A. (1994, October 26). Juiced up: How a tobacco giant doctors snuff to boost their kick. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/#id=kjbm0067>
- Grant, B., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSW-IV alcohol of abuse and dependence. Results from the national longitudinal alcohol. Epidemiologic survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 9(1), 103-110.

- Hadjiphani, A., Hadjiphanis, L., & Christou, L. (2009). Marketing regulation and consumer behavior: Ethical issues in marketing to children. *Journal of Business Administration*, 7(2). Retrieved from [http://www.atu.edu/jbao/fall2008/Ethical\\_issues\\_in\\_marketing\\_to\\_children\\_Lycourgos\\_Angela\\_Loizos%20edited.doc](http://www.atu.edu/jbao/fall2008/Ethical_issues_in_marketing_to_children_Lycourgos_Angela_Loizos%20edited.doc)
- Hargreaves, D., & Tiggemann, M. (2002). The effect of television commercials on mood and body dissatisfaction: The role of appearance-schema activation. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 21(3), 287-308.
- Harmon, M.D. (2001). Affluenza: Television use and cultivation of materialism. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 405-418. doi:10.1207/S15327825MCS0404\_5
- Henriksen, L., Feighery, E. C., Wang, Y., & Fortmann, S. P. (2004). Association of retail tobacco marketing with adolescent smoking. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(12), 2081-2083. doi:10.2105/ajph.94.12.2081
- Herbert, B. (1993, November 28). Tobacco dollars in America. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/28/opinion/in-america-tobacco-dollars.html>
- Hillsberg, A. (2014). The art of deceptive advertising: Quick review of false & misleading tricks used in ads. *Financesonline*. Retrieved from <https://reviews.financesonline.com/the-art-of-deceptive-advertising-reviewed/>
- Hood, D. (2000, November). Is advertising to kids wrong? Marketers respond. *Kidscreen*. Retrieved from <http://kidscreen.com/2000/11/01/30304-20001101/>
- How marketers target kids. (2015). *Mediasmarts*. Retrieved from <http://mediasmarts.ca/marketing-consumerism/how-marketers-target-kids>
- Impulsive [Def. 2]. (n.d.). In *Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impulsive>
- Institute of Medicine. (2006a). Report brief: Progress in preventing childhood obesity - How do we measure up? (p.1). Retrieved from [http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/36/984/11722\\_reportbrief.pdf](http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/36/984/11722_reportbrief.pdf)
- Institute of Medicine. (2006b). *Food marketing to children and youth: Threat or opportunity?* (p.2). Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.
- Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Kent, J. (2013, April 11). Ban all advertising aimed at young children? I say yes. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/11/ban-advertising-young-children-yes>
- Kramer, D. (2010). *Effects of psychological torture (Master's Thesis)*. Berkeley Law University of California. Retrieved from [https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/EffectsofPsychologicalTorturepaper\(Final\)11June10.pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/EffectsofPsychologicalTorturepaper(Final)11June10.pdf)
- Laffernis, T. (2014, April 2). Apple slices or fries? 'Deceptive' fast food advertising confuses children. *Tech Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/5117/20140402/apple-slices-fries-deceptive-fast-food-advertising-confuses-children.htm#sthash.R2Vshd1B.dpuf>
- LaTour, M. S., & Rotfeld, H. J. (1997). There are threats and (maybe) fear-caused arousal: Theory and confusions of appeals to fear and fear arousal itself. *Journal of Advertising*, 26(3), 45-59.
- LaTour, M.S., & Zahra, S.A. (1989). Fear appeals as advertising strategy: Should they be used? *Journal of Services Marketing*, 2(4), 5-14. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/eb024737>

- Lindsay, G. B. (1997). *Make a killing: A smoking satire on selling cigarettes*. Bountiful, UT : Horizon.
- Lorillard. (1978, August 30). *Memo from executive TL Achey to former Lorillard President Curtis Judge re Newport brand*. Bates No. TINY0003062.
- Macklin, M. C., & Carlson, L. (Eds.) (1999). *Advertising to children: Concepts and controversies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Milla, T. R. Levy, D. T, Spicer, R. S., & Taylor, D. M. (2006). Societal costs of underage drinking. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 67(4), 519- 528.
- Mohideen, A.K. (2009). Ethical values of advertising in print and electronic media (A study on fairness products in Visakhapatnam city). *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 39 (12), 29-32.
- National Cancer Institute. (2008). *The role of the media in promoting and reducing tobacco use. Tobacco Control Monograph No. 19*. NIH Publication No. 07-6242. Bethesda (MD): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Health, National Cancer Institute.
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.(n.d.). *Alcohol involvement in United States traffic accidents (Annual Publication)*. Washington, DC: NHTSA, National Center for Statistics and Analysis.
- Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2005). *I'm, like, so fat!* New York : Guilford. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2006.07.011
- Olshansky, S. J., Passaro, D. J., & Hershow, R. C. (2005). A potential decline in life expectancy in the United States in the 21 st century. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 352 (11), 1138-1145. doi:10.1056/NEJMSr043743
- Philip Morris. (1981, March 31). *Young smokers : Prevalence, trend, implications and related demographic trend. Philip Morris Special Report*. Bates No. 1000390803.
- Powell, L. M., Szczypka, G., Chaloupka, F. J., & Braunschweig, C. L. (2007). Nutritional content of television food advertisements seen by children and adolescents in the United States [Electronic version]. *Pediatrics*, 120(3), 576-583.
- R. J. Reynolds. (1984, Feb 29). *Young adult smokers: Strategies and opportunities. R. J. Reynolds Report*. Bates No. 501928462 -8550.
- Richins, M. L. (2004). The material values scale: Measurement properties and development of a short form. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (1), 209-219.
- Robbins, R. (2016, June 2). Comic books. Lesson plans. How drug companies target kids. *STAT News*. Retrieved from <https://www.statnews.com/2016/06/02/drug-marketing-kids/>
- Schor, J. (2006). When childhood gets commercialized, can children be protected? In Carlsson, U., & eds. (2006). *Regulation, awareness, empowerment: Young people and harmful media content in the digital age* (pp. 101-122) . Gothenburg, Sweden: International Clearing House on Children, Youth, and Media.
- Schouten, R., & Silver, J. (2012). *Almost a psychopath: Do I (or does someone I know) have a problem with manipulation and lack of empathy?* Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Shah, A. (2010, November 21). Children as consumers. *Global Issues*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalissues.org/article/237/children-as-consumers>
- Southern, L. (2016, January 6). Snickers' mines behavioral data to find 'windows of impulsivity'. *Digiday*. Retrieved from <http://digiday.com/brands/snickers-satisfies/>



- Strasburger, V. C. (2004). Children, adolescents, the media. *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*, 34(2), 54-113. doi: 10.1016/j.cppeds.2003.08.001
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1989). *Reducing the health consequences of smoking – 25 years of progress. A report of the surgeon general. DHHS Publication No. (CDC) 89-8411*. Washington, DC: DHHS.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1990). *Seventh special report of the U.S. Congress on alcohol and health*. Rockville, MD: Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). *The health consequences of smoking - 50 years of progress: A report of the surgeon general*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC. Available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/tobacco>
- Webster, C. D., & Jackson, M. A. (eds.), (1997). *Impulsivity: Theory, assessment, and treatment*. New York and London: Guilford Press.
- Wishnie, H. (1977). *The impulsive personality: Understanding people with destructive personality disorders*. New York and London : Plenum Pub Corp.
- Worland, J. D. (2015, January 19). Here's what alcohol advertising does to kids. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3672188/alcohol-advertising-kids/>