

**Title: The development of brand attitudes among young consumers**

**Author Details** *(please list these in the order they should appear in the published article)*

Author 1 Name: Maria Pagla  
Department: Purchasing  
University/Institution: Statoil  
Town/City: Stavanger  
State (US only):  
Country: Norway

Author 2 Name: Ross Brennan  
Department: Marketing & Enterprise  
University/Institution: University of Hertfordshire  
Town/City: Hatfield  
State (US only):  
Country: United Kingdom

*NOTE: affiliations should appear as the following: Department (if applicable); Institution; City; State (US only); Country. No further information or detail should be included*

**Corresponding author:** Ross Brennan  
**Corresponding Author's Email:** [d.r.brennan@herts.ac.uk](mailto:d.r.brennan@herts.ac.uk)

*Please check this box if you do not wish your email address to be published*

**Acknowledgments (if applicable):**

**Biographical Details (if applicable):**

[Author 1 bio]

Dr. Maria Pagla is a Purchasing Executive with Statoil, Norway. She was awarded her PhD by Middlesex University for research into brand development among young consumers.

[Author 2 bio]

Dr. Ross Brennan is Reader in Marketing at the University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. His research interests include social marketing, business-to-business marketing, and marketing strategy.

[Author 3 bio]

[Author 4 bio]

**Structured Abstract:**

**Purpose**

The article examines factors affecting the development of brand attitudes and brand behaviour among children aged 7 to 12.

**Design/Methodology**

The study involved a literature review investigating the theoretical models underlying studies of brand attitude development among children and empirical studies of brand attitude development, and an empirical study using a questionnaire administered to a sample of 221 Cypriot children.

### **Findings**

Cypriot children are found to have high awareness of internationally famous brands. The principal influences on children's brand attitudes are older siblings, parents and close friends. Brand attitudes are the principal influence on brand behavior (brand requesting and brand buying). Age is found to be an important factor affecting brand buying decisions, with older children more likely than younger children to buy brands

### **Research limitations/implications**

Generalization of the results beyond the population from which the sample was drawn should be undertaken with caution. Further research in geographically and culturally close regions would extend this research.

### **Practical implications**

Cognitive development is very rapid in this age group, and marketers should segment for age. Younger children are more influenced by intra-family socialization factors, older children more by extra-family socialization factors.

### **Originality/value**

The study investigated the relatively under-explored pre-teen age group, and examined children across a sufficiently wide age range to encompass different stages in psychological models of child cognitive development. The research context (a Mediterranean country) is also original.

**Keywords:** Marketing to children; Brand attitudes; Consumer socialization

**Article Classification:** Research paper

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRAND ATTITUDES AMONG YOUNG CONSUMERS

## Introduction

Marketing to children is a topic of enduring interest. For example, recent studies have examined children's consumer socialization (Dotson & Hyatt 2005), children's purchasing and consumer behavior (McNeal and Yeh 2003; Wimalasiri 2004; Fan and Li 2010), children's media usage (Chan and McNeal 2006; Priya, Baisya and Sharma 2010), and children's brand name preferences (Baxter and Lowrey 2011). Brands are important to children, and it has been argued that relationships with brands are "the tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, fulfill their dreams, and become connect with others" (Ji 2002: 383). On the other hand, the promotion of brands among children is an area of marketing practice that raises important issues at the interface between marketing and society. The debate about "pester power" is a prominent example of the kinds of issue that arise in this problematic area (Procter & Richards 2002, Spungin 2004, McDermott et al 2006), but concerns about the effects of persuasive commercials on children have a long history (Fischer 1985). Key questions that arise are the extent to which children are influenced by branding, whether this influence is turned into behaviors directed at influencing family purchasing patterns, and the extent to which parents are influenced by such behaviors. This paper addresses a fundamental issue underlying all of these questions, namely, how young children form attitudes towards brands.

Consumer socialization is the process by which children attain the abilities, information and attitudes essential to function as consumers. Numerous socio-cultural forces such as siblings, parents, peers, school, shopping experiences and mass media influence this process (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Peracchio, 1992). Much prior research has focused on teenagers, who have more or less fully developed cognitive skills and considerable independence as consumers. Haynes et al (1993) examined consumer socialization among children aged 3-6 and found that they had not developed the perceptual skills needed for brand discrimination. This paper examines the nature of consumer behavior and socialization of young consumers aged 7 to 12, a particularly interesting age group lying between younger children with relatively undeveloped cognitive skills and brand preferences, and older children with well-developed intellectual abilities and brand preferences.

While much is known about child developmental stages, about general child socialization, and about the general development of attitudes in young children, relatively little is known about the development of children's brand attitudes as part of the consumer socialization process. The paper focuses on this gap in knowledge in the research context of young school children in Cyprus. The contribution of the paper is twofold. First, while much of the prior research in this field has concentrated on teenagers, this paper focuses on consumer socialization and the development of brand attitudes among children aged 7 to 12. Theories of child cognitive development have shown that this is a particularly important transitional period where children develop systematic thinking and the ability to represent the world mentally, but not the capacity for abstract reasoning (Piaget 1970). **Specifically, in the field of the consumer socialization of children, John (1999) proposes a stages model in which children aged approximately 3 to 7 constitute the perceptual stage, children aged 7 to 11 constitute the analytical stage, and children age 11 to 16 constitute the reflective stage. John (1999) observes that many more studies have been conducted of the reflective stage, and that the analytical stage has been relatively neglected. Consequently, the present study focuses on the intermediate age group.** In addition, the empirical research reported here was conducted in Cyprus. Mediterranean countries have been under-represented in prior studies of consumer socialization and children's brand attitudes. **Many studies of consumer socialization have been conducted in North**

America (for example, Moschis & Churchill 1978; Moschis & Moore 1979; Roedder 1981; Keillor, Parker & Schaefer 1996; Yoh 2005; Dotson & Hyatt 2005), and Chan and colleagues have investigated the topic extensively in China (Chan 2006; Chan & McNeal 2006; Chan & Hu 2008), but no prior studies of Mediterranean countries could be found.

A review of prior literature about child development in general, and focusing on the consumer socialization of children specifically, revealed a number of factors that are believed to influence children's attitudes to brands: influences within the family (particularly parents and siblings) and influences outside the family (particularly close friends, classmates, and TV advertising). These influencing factors were operationalized in the questionnaire, and the findings about the relative importance of these factors are reported in this paper.

The paper commences with a short review of some of the key prior literature concerning the children's market, child development and consumer socialization. Subsequently the methods used to gather empirical data for the project are described. The results from the survey are then presented, and assessed from the point of view of prior knowledge about child development and influences on children's brand attitudes. The concluding section presents reflections on the limitations of this project and on the opportunities for further research.

## **Brands and kids: Theoretical background & prior research**

### *The children's market*

Gunter and Furnham (1998) observe that there are two key questions to ask when investigating the size of the children's market: first, how many children there are in the area or country of interest, and secondly how much the average child has to spend. Throughout the developed world it is known that the amount of money that children have to spend has increased rapidly in recent years. In the USA it is estimated that children aged less than 14 spend \$40 billion each year, that children aged less than 12 influence \$500 billion of purchases, and that \$17 billion is spent on marketing to children (Linn 2004; Dotson and Hyatt 2005). In the UK the Office for National Statistics (2005) has found that children aged between 7 and 17 had an average of £13.00 per week to spend, during the years 2002-2004. According to Mayo (2005: p. 7) "the children's market is real and substantial", with 11 million children aged under 15 in the UK. The total child-oriented market in the UK is estimated to be £30bn, with the children's clothing market worth £6bn (Hollis, 2002) and sales of toys amounting to £2bn (British Association of Toy Retailers, 2003). Childnet International (2005) has found that the goods and services bought by young consumers with their own money are as follows (ranked in order from highest aggregate value to lowest aggregate value): snacks & sweets; clothes; music & CDs; footwear; software; magazines, and finally toiletries.

Gunter and Furnham (1998), contend that it is not easy to establish how much money youngsters have to spend because children have numerous sources of "purchasing power". These may include gifts of money from parents or relatives, earned income from odd-jobs, and allowances or pocket money which may also be partially earned. Although the amount of disposable cash that children have varies considerably over time there is clear pattern of growth especially in early adolescence. Income data for this group, however, is not always available and often only rough estimates exist.

### *Child cognitive development and brand knowledge*

The cognitive development of children has been the subject of lengthy investigation in the field of psychology. Marketing researchers have striven to understand the implications of child cognitive development for consumer socialization and the development of brand knowledge and brand attitudes. This section provides a brief overview of prior literature in these fields.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development is probably the best known framework for distinguishing changes in fundamental cognitive abilities. The theory proposes four core stages of cognitive development: sensori-motor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), and formal operational (11-15) (Ginsburg and Oppenheimer 1988). Piaget (1970) argued that children advance through a series of stages of intellectual development, each stage defined by the emergence of a different set of cognitive structures.

John (Roedder 1981, John 1999, note that these are the same author) researched the marketing implications of children's cognitive development, in terms of responses to media messages and consumer socialization. According to John (1999:184):

“the period from birth to adolescence contains dramatic developments in cognitive functioning and social maturation. Children develop abilities to go beyond perceptual appearances to think more abstractly about their environment, acquire information processing skills to more readily organize and use what they learn about their environment, and develop a deeper understanding of interpersonal situations, which allows them to see their world through multiple perspectives.”

By analogy with the general processes of child development proposed by Piaget and Selman (1980), John (1999) has suggested that consumer socialization should be considered as a developmental process progressing through a series of stages as children develop fully into adult consumers, and that significant changes occur as children progress through the stages of consumer socialization. **A three-stage process of consumer socialization is proposed by John (1999): the perceptual stage (ages 3 to 7); the analytical stage (ages 7 to 11); and the reflective stage (ages 11 to 16). This study focuses on the analytical stage.**

Several previous studies have investigated empirically the emergence of brand awareness and brand attitudes among children; these studies frequently employ the underlying ideas from child developmental psychology to seek to understand how children's response to brands develops at different ages and stages of cognitive development. For example, Hogg et al (1998) researched children between 7 and 11 because work in developmental and cognitive child psychology suggested that these age groups are capable of concrete operationalisation and would be able to cope in experimental conditions. These young consumers were participants in a study to investigate brand recognition of fashion goods in UK, focusing on the dimensions used when comparing and evaluating clothing brands. The research design involved three stages with collages for brand recognition and a questionnaire (Hogg et al, 1998). Brand recognition was found across all age groups.

Achenreiner and John (2003) investigated the age at which children use conceptual brand meanings to make consumer judgments. They found that conceptual brand meanings, which specify the non-observable abstract features of the product, are first used in middle childhood (around age 8) and are incorporated into children's thinking and judgments a few years later. By the time children reach 12 they are able to think about brands on a conceptual or symbolic level and are also likely to incorporate these meanings into many types of brand-related judgments (Achenreiner and John 2003).

Valkenburg and Buijzen's (2005) investigated, firstly, how children's brand recognition and brand recall develops in early childhood, and, secondly, the relative influence of several environmental factors on young children's brand recognition and recall. Children's brand recognition was found to follow a different developmental path

from that of their brand recall. The most significant increase in brand recognition occurred between 3 and 5 years of age, whereas the most significant increase in brand recall occurred between 7 and 8 years of age.

### *Social influences on children's understanding of brands*

A number of socio-cultural forces such as parents, peers, school, shopping skills and mass media can be major influences during the process of consumer socialization (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Peracchio, 1992; Gunter and Furnham 1998). Moschis and Moore (1979), and Churchill and Moschis (1979), examined the role of various socialization agents on consumer learning. They investigated decision-making among teenage consumers, focusing on several different stages of the process. Explanations for behavior at each stage were sought through socialization variables. The findings consistently support the notion that the media, peers, and the family are key variables in adolescent learning. In addition, these studies lend support for the need to include social structural variables such as age, sex and social class to fully understand how young people learn consumer skills.

Bachmann, John and Rao (1993) found that peer group influence on product awareness and purchasing behavior emerges gradually as children progress through their elementary school. Children aged 6 to 8 viewed the degree of peer group influence as rather constant across product types while children aged 9 to 11 and 12 to 14 reacted differently to peer-group pressure depending on how conspicuous a product was. The conclusion was that peer group purchase influence emerges slowly as children progress through their elementary school years. Subsequent studies have confirmed the importance of peer influence on the brand attitudes and purchasing decisions of young people (Keillor et al 1996; Kamaruddin and Moklis 2003; Lachance et al 2003; Elliott and Leonard 2004; Yoh 2005).

Family members are important social influences on children's brand attitudes and purchasing behavior. Research has concentrated on parents and siblings. McNeal (1992) found that children start to request brands and products from the age of two. During this stage children start exerting pester power on their parents by nagging and begin to negotiate with them for items, indicating their attention to the features and qualities of the product (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2002). By the time children turn three, with their parents' consent and supervision they start to choose products (McNeal, 1992). Siblings play a major role in each other's cognitive development. In many non-Western cultures, older siblings are culture brokers who may be as influential as or even more influential than parents in socializing young children (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). Although in Western cultures siblings are usually not as influential as parents, they still play important roles. Siblings spend a significant amount of the time together; the generally positive quality of their interactions and the high degree of mutual imitation suggest that they enjoy each other's company and are quite interested in each other's behavior. Moreover, the natural mismatch between siblings' competencies provides an ideal context for the acquisition of skills (Hartup, 1989).

The present study investigates the social influences on children's attitudes towards brands and on brand purchasing behavior among Cypriot children aged 7 to 12. The following research questions **and hypotheses** are addressed:

RQ1: What factors influence children's attitudes towards brands?

**H1: Children's attitudes towards brands are positively associated with:**

**H1a: the opinions of older siblings**

**H1b: the opinions of parents**

**H1c: the opinions school classmates**

**H1d: the opinions of close friends**

**H1e: the representation of brands in TV advertisements**

H1f: age.

RQ2: What factors influence children's behavior towards brands (brand requesting and brand buying)?

H2: Children's behavior towards brands (brand requesting and brand buying) is positively associated with:

H2a: attitude towards the brand

H2b: the opinions of older siblings

H2c: the opinions of parents

H2d: the opinions school classmates

H2e: the opinions of close friends

H2f: the representation of brands in TV advertisements

H2g: age.

## Research methods

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research concerning children. The research approach adopted in the project described here was subjected to close academic ethical scrutiny, and approved, by the Ethics Panel at the authors' university. Explicit permission was obtained from the educational authorities in Cyprus and from the head teachers, class teachers and parents at the participating schools. Participation by the children in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point.

The empirical context for the study was school-children aged between 7 and 12 attending elementary (primary) school in Cyprus. In addition to ethical issues, research among children also raises particular methodological issues (Fraser et al 2004; Greene and Hogan 2005). A review of the empirical methods used in prior studies of children's consumer socialization and brand attitudes showed that the self-completion questionnaire was the most common approach, followed by experiments, interviews, and discussion groups. So long as self-completion questionnaires are appropriately designed for the respondent age group, with due attention paid to issues such as language complexity and questionnaire length, they are a suitable vehicle for gathering data from children.

Data were collected in two phases. The first, exploratory phase (n=121) was conducted just before Christmas and, following the method employed by Otnes et al (1994), the questionnaire was organized around the children's gift requests for Christmas. This phase enabled the researchers to establish credibility and trust with the teaching teams at the schools. The main findings reported in this paper are based on the second phase of fieldwork: a structured survey of brand attitude formation conducted at the schools (n=221). The survey used closed Likert-scaled questions to investigate the children's attitudes towards brands, and the relative influence of friends, siblings, parents and advertising in the development of the children's brand attitudes. Open questions were kept to a minimum since it is known that young children find open questions difficult to answer; open questions were used only to identify the brands with which the children were familiar. The questionnaires were self-completed by the children in the presence of one of the authors and the children's own class teacher. With younger children, in particular, this meant that clarification of the instructions could be provided if necessary. The survey was conducted in Nicosia, a Greek-speaking part of Cyprus, and the questionnaire administration was overseen by one of the authors who is a native Greek speaker. Initially, the questionnaires for both the first and second phases were written in English, since they were partially based upon items developed for prior studies in English-speaking countries. They were translated into Greek, and back-translated into English to check for accuracy. Three bilingual speakers of English and Greek participated in the translation process.

Gaining access to primary schools for purposes of research is understandably difficult, and so the schools that took part in the study were those to which the Cypriot authorities granted access and where the head teacher

agreed to co-operate. Initially, contact was made through the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. Seven schools in Nicosia participated, all members of the Cypriot state school system. Within each school, the sample of children achieved depended on the number of parents who granted permission for their child to participate. It was noticeable that parents of younger children were more reluctant to allow their children to take part, so that the younger age groups (Cypriot grades 2 and 3) are slightly less well-represented in the sample than older age groups. However, despite these constraints, the demographic characteristics of the sample achieved indicate that it was reasonably representative of primary-school age Cypriot children.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The demographic characteristics of the sample from the main quantitative phase of the study (phase 2) are shown in Table 1. This shows a good balance between boys and girls, between those from urban areas and those from rural areas, and across the age ranges, with a slight bias to the older age ranges as explained above. The sample is reasonably representative of children aged between 7 and 12 attending primary school in Cyprus, although while boys represented 47.1% of the sample, data indicate that boys are 51.3% of pupils in Cypriot public primary schools (Cyprus Ministry of Education 2009). In Table 1 the age ranges are reported in whole years, while in the questionnaire itself children were asked to identify their age to the nearest half-year (seven, seven-and-a-half, and so on) to give finer-grained detail about age-related phenomena.

Measurement items for the quantitative phase of the study were obtained from two sources: Pecheux and Derbaix's (1999) children's attitude towards the brand scale, and Dotson and Hyatt's (2005) measures of socialization influences within and outside the family. These measures were minimally adapted for the context of the study following the exploratory phase of the research; the measurement items originated from North American studies and required minor adaptation to be fully understood in the different context. The main questionnaire included 15 statements designed to measure the influence of socialization agents (close friends, classmates, older siblings, parents, TV advertising), measured on a 5-point Likert scale. An example question is "my classmates' opinions are important when I buy brands". Brand attitude was measured using five statements, of which an example is "I think it is fashionable to buy brands". Buying behavior towards brands was measured by two questions, "how often do you ask for brands?" and "how often do you buy brands?" both measured on a five-point scale from "never" to "always". The final measurement items used in the questionnaire are listed in the appendix. Descriptive and univariate analysis was conducted at the level of the individual variables, while for purposes of multivariate analysis the individual items were summated to construct a dependent variable (brand behavior) and five explanatory variables (close friends, classmates, older siblings, parents, TV advertising); in addition the demographic variables gender and age were used as explanatory variables. Brand behavior was regressed on the seven explanatory variables using both the enter method and the stepwise method. The results from the descriptive, univariate and multivariate analyses are discussed in the following section.

The research method relied on self-reported data, with which common method variance may be a problem (Campbell & Fiske 1959; Podsakoff & Organ 1986). At the suggestion of Podsakoff and Organ (1986) and following the example of Andersson and Bateman (1997), a *post-hoc* factor analysis (Harman's single-factor test) was performed, revealing the presence of five distinct factors among the socialization and attitude towards the brand measures. Although these results do not constitute conclusive evidence for the absence of common method variance, they suggest that it is not a likely explanation for the reported findings.

## Findings & discussion



### *Brand preferences*

The children were asked to name three brands that they had bought during the preceding week and three brands that they had requested as Christmas presents (the fieldwork was carried out in the weeks leading up to Christmas). The 10 most frequently occurring brands reportedly bought and requested are shown in Table 2. Very few local Cypriot brands were represented anywhere in these lists, and none were represented in the top 10. Clearly, the brands that appear in Table 2 are all internationally famous brands, suggesting that our sample of Cypriot children aspire to own the same brands as children elsewhere in the developed world (and probably beyond). Naturally, the brands appearing in the Christmas present list tend to represent more expensive products, such as mobile phones and entertainment consoles. The brands appearing in the ‘most bought’ list include drinks and snacks. Clothing brands, synonymous with training shoe and sporting brands, appear in both lists. There is only one explicitly gendered brand in either of these top 10 lists, namely Barbie appearing in 10<sup>th</sup> place on the Christmas present list.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

Figures 1 and 2 show the responses for four ‘generic’ questions about attitudes and behaviors towards brands: how much the children like brands, whether or not brands are value-for-money, how often they request brands, and how often they buy brands. Clearly, as expected, the children have strong liking for brands, since 64% agree or agree strongly that they like to buy brands. There is much less agreement about whether brands represent value-for-money (33% agree/agree strongly, 40% disagree/disagree strongly). We will see below that there were age-related differences in the answers to this question. Concerning the children’s reported behavior towards brands, the data suggest that they *buy* brands slightly more frequently than they *request* brands: 37% say that they “always/frequently” buy brands, whereas 30% say that they “always/frequently” ask for brands.

### *Brand influences*

Having briefly examined some of the general responses to the questionnaire, the discussion now moves on to evaluate the relative importance of different influences on the children’s brand-related behavior.

(Insert Table 3 about here)

Five different influence categories were measured in the survey of children: close friends, classmates, older siblings, parents, and TV advertisements. The importance of each of these five influences was measured in three different ways: children’s perceptions of the importance attached to brands by those influences, children’s beliefs about the importance of the influence on their behavior, and children’s beliefs about the compatibility of their brand preferences with those of the influence groups. The results from these questions are summarized in Table 3. In order to examine the relative importance of the five influence groups, the mean scores from the Likert scales, shown in Table 3, were converted into a rank order of influencing factors, shown in Table 4.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

The rank order for the five influence categories, for each of the three measures of influence (think that brands are important; opinion is important; have the same brand preferences) is summarized in Table 4. The final column of Table 4 shows an overall ranking calculated from the preceding three columns by calculating a sum-of-ranks (for example, sum-of-ranks for siblings is 4; sum-of-ranks for classmates is 12). Clearly, the respondents believe that

siblings are consistently important in forming their brand attitudes. The role played by parents is interesting, and the data are intuitively plausible: the respondents believe that their parents do not consider brands to be very important, that they like different brands from their parents, but nevertheless say that their parents' opinions are highly influential on their own brand choices. This suggests that, since the parents generally hold the purse strings, the children are inclined to opt for brand choices which they believe will be acceptable to their parents, even though their own brand preferences differ from those of their parents.

It is interesting to see the different roles of 'close friends' and 'classmates' in Table 4. Evidently the children had no difficulty in distinguishing between these two categories, and equally evidently the influence of close friends is markedly more important than the role of classmates in shaping children's brand attitudes. In particular classmates were ranked last in terms of 'liking the same brands', whereas close friends were ranked second. This suggests that, outside of family influences (siblings and parents), the peer pressure that children feel to conform to certain brand choices comes from a narrow group of close friends, not from the broader social group represented by their whole class.

The respondents believed that TV advertisements were the least important influence overall in shaping their brand attitudes. However, when considering the influence of TV advertisements, and of close friends and classmates, there were some noteworthy age-related differences, which will now be discussed.

Table 5 shows the questions in the survey for which statistically significant age-related differences were found. The theoretical rationale for expecting age-related differences emerges from the literature on child developmental psychology discussed earlier, and the notion that children go through stages of cognitive development so that older children are capable of more sophisticated cognitive tasks than younger children. To explore whether such differences were shown in the data, children were classified into three age categories: aged up to 8 (least cognitively developed), aged 8.5 to 10.5, and aged 11 and older (most cognitively developed). The mean scores on the Likert scales were calculated for each of these categories, and t-tests were conducted on the difference between the mean scores.

(Insert Table 5 about here)

For the first three questions in Table 5, there is a statistically significant difference between the youngest category and the two older categories. For the fourth question there is a statistically significant difference between the middle category and the oldest category. For the fifth question there is a statistically significant difference between the youngest category and the oldest category. These findings suggest the following for our sample of Cypriot children.

- Older children's brand attitudes are more influenced by peer pressure outside the family (classmates and close friends) than younger children;
- Older children perceive brands to be better value-for-money than do younger children;
- Older children buy brands more frequently than younger children;
- Older children's brand preferences may be less influenced by TV advertisements than those of younger children.

#### *Predictors of brand attitudes and brand behaviors*

Multiple regression was used to investigate the relationships between brand attitude, and brand behavior, and the explanatory variables (socialization agents and demographic characteristics). Brand attitude was included as an explanatory variable for brand behavior. Both the enter and the stepwise regression methods were used, but there were few differences between the results of the two methods. The discussion will primarily focus on the results of the stepwise analysis, which are illustrated in Table 6.

(Insert Table 6 about here)

Table 6 shows the results from four regression analyses. The first shows that, in order of effect size, older siblings, close friends and parents are the three most important factors influencing brand attitude. The second shows that brand attitude is has the largest influence on brand behavior, while classmates, TV advertising and age are other influences; notice that the coefficient on TV advertising is negative, however. The third and fourth analyses then look at the individual components of brand behavior – brand requesting by the children, and brand buying. It seems that brand attitudes, classmates and TV advertising have the greatest effects on brand requesting, while brand attitudes and age have the greatest effects on brand buying.

The results from the multiple regression are consistent with the univariate analysis presented in the previous section. Older siblings, parents and close friends are important determinants of brand attitude, while classmates and TV advertisements are not. Demographic characteristics (age, sex and area of residence) are not found to be significant influencers of brand attitude. Brand attitude is the most important factor influencing brand behavior, including both brand requesting and brand buying. While age was not found to influence brand attitude, there is evidence that age influences brand behavior, specifically by affecting brand buying rather than brand requesting. Older children are more likely than younger children to report that they buy brands. This presumably reflects the fact that older children have more money and greater independence than younger children, so can make their own independent buying decisions more frequently, and choose to buy branded products.

Concerning the formal hypotheses stated earlier in the paper, these results indicate the following conclusions.

H1: Children's attitudes towards brands are positively associated with:

- H1a: the opinions of older siblings—ACCEPTED
- H1b: the opinions of parents—ACCEPTED
- H1c: the opinions school classmates—REJECTED
- H1d: the opinions of close friends—ACCEPTED
- H1e: the representation of brands in TV advertisements—REJECTED
- H1f: age—REJECTED

H2: Children's behavior towards brands (brand requesting and brand buying) is positively associated with:

- H2a: attitude towards the brand—ACCEPTED
- H2b: the opinions of older siblings—REJECTED
- H2c: the opinions of parents—REJECTED
- H2d: the opinions school classmates—ACCEPTED
- H2e: the opinions of close friends—REJECTED
- H2f: the representation of brands in TV advertisements—REJECTED
- H2g: age—ACCEPTED

The place of TV advertising in this analysis requires some consideration. At first sight the negative regression coefficient between brand behavior and TV advertising seems counter-intuitive. However, it is important to distinguish between brand attitudes and brand behavior. Although TV advertising was not selected as a predictor variable in the stepwise multiple regression for brand attitude shown in Table 6, the comparable regression equation using the enter method showed a positive coefficient that was significant at the 10% level – in other words, there are tentative grounds for believing that there is a small, positive influence of TV advertising on brand attitudes. However, the finding from the survey is that children who report that they are more heavily influenced by TV advertising also report that they ask for brands less frequently. It is possible, therefore, that children who are more influenced by TV advertising develop more settled opinions about which brands to request and

concentrate their requests on a small number of favored brands. The research instrument used in the present study does not permit this hypothesis to be tested further.

## Conclusion, limitations & further research

While prior studies concentrated a great deal on child developmental stages, general child socialization, and the general development of attitudes in young children, the current study focused on the development of children's brand attitudes as part of the consumer socialization process. The research concentrated on this gap in knowledge in the research context of young school children in Cyprus. The study examined demographic factors and social aspects as well as elements of brand attitudes affecting the development of behavior among a sample of 6 to 12 year old primary school children in Cyprus. The research was based on prior theoretical models of child development and empirical studies of the development of consumer behavior among children.

Generally, in terms of the impact of social factors, there is strong evidence that family influence is particularly important to the growth of attitudes and behavior among Cypriot children. Prior empirical studies have suggested that children's cognitive and social development is also affected by peers and the media; the current research has found that peers and TV advertisements have an influence on young consumers brand attitudes.

More specifically, participants aged 6 to 12 years of age appeared to possess high awareness of internationally famous brands. Age was found to be significant when comparing younger and older children's brand influences and beliefs. Older children's brand attitudes were more influenced by peer pressure outside the family (classmates and close friends). However, older children's brand preferences may be less influenced by TV advertisements than those of younger children. Older children perceive brands to be better value-for money than do younger children and buy brands more frequently than younger children.

Clearly, any generalizations from this study should be made only with caution. This study was conducted among 221 children of primary school age in Greek-speaking Cyprus; we would argue that generalizing to the relevant population (young children in Greek-speaking Cyprus) is well-justified, and that generalizing to closely related populations (such as mainland Greece) is fairly well-justified. It may also be the case that these findings can be generalized more widely to Mediterranean countries such as Turkey and Italy, but, equally, such countries represent interesting opportunities for further research. Particularly interesting avenues for additional research would be to conduct similar studies among the Turkish-speaking community on Cyprus, in mainland Greece and Turkey, and in a geographically and culturally close Arab country such as Jordan. The results from such studies, when combined with previous studies in North America and northern Europe, would help us to understand the extent to which child consumer socialization is globalized, and the extent to which it is affected by local culture.

The key contribution from this work has been to conduct an empirical study investigating consumer socialization and the development of children's brand attitudes outside the Anglo-Saxon world. Indeed, the majority of prior studies have been conducted in a single country, the USA. At first sight, it seems that there may be strong similarities between the factors influencing children's brand attitudes in our study and in prior studies. The Cypriot children demonstrated high brand awareness at all primary-school ages, very much like the British children in earlier work by Hogg et al (1998). Prior studies by Achenreicher and John (2003) and by Valkenburg and Buijzen (2005) have found differences in cognitive response to brands between the older and younger primary-school children, and the present study also found important differences between children aged above and below 8. In broad terms the social influences on children's brand attitudes among this Cypriot sample are similar to the social influences identified in prior work by Moschis and Moore (1982) and by Bachmann, John and Rao (1993). However, this study also points, in particular, to the high importance of within-family influences (parents and siblings) on brand attitudes among young consumers in Cyprus. One might expect within-family influences to be particularly important in the traditionally family-orientated cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. On this matter the findings from this study are interesting but far from conclusive. It is a subject that merits further investigation.

## **Appendix**

### **Measures used in the study**

#### **SOCIALIZATION INFLUENCES OUTSIDE THE FAMILY**

My close friends think that brands are important  
My close friends' opinion is important when I buy brands  
I like the brands which my close friends like  
My classmates think that brands are important  
My classmates' opinion is important when I buy brands  
I like the brands which my classmates like  
TV advertisements make me think that brands are important  
TV advertisements are important when I buy brands  
I like the brands which I see on TV advertisements

#### **SOCIALIZATION INFLUENCES WITHIN THE FAMILY**

My older brother/sister think that brands are important (Answer only if you have older brother/sister)  
My older brother's/sister's opinion is important when I buy brands (Answer only if you have older brother/sister)  
I like the brands which my older brother/sister like (Answer only if you have older brother/sister)  
My parents think that brands are important  
My parents' opinion is important when I buy brands  
I like the brands which my parents like

#### **BRAND ATTITUDE**

I like to buy brands  
I think it is very good to buy brands  
I think it is fun to buy brands  
I think it is value for money to buy brands  
I think it is fashionable to buy brands

#### **BRAND BEHAVIOUR**

How often do you ask for brands? (BRAND REQUESTING)  
How often do you buy brands? (BRAND BUYING)

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